Turkey's Kurdish Question: Irresistible Force and Immovable Object

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The future status of the Kurds of Turkey constitutes the most serious challenge facing the Turkish Republic. The "Kurdish Question" dominates Turkish security concerns and hangs over Turkish foreign relations and domestic politics, and its importance is only increasing. This monograph argues that contemporary developments in Iraq, together with ongoing patterns of migration and economic development in the southeastern and western regions of Turkey, pose a gathering challenge to the Kemalist principle of Turkish nationalism that underlies the republic.

After introducing the Kurds, the monograph traces the evolution of the Kurdish Question from its beginnings as a matter of tribal vs. central state authority in the sixteenth century through its internationalization in the late Ottoman period to its ethno-nationalization in the latter part of the twentieth century. Although the paper focuses on the political dynamics, it also addresses the underlying social, economic, and demographic aspects and how these have changed.

This historical discussion explains why, from Ankara's perspective, the threat posed by Kurdish separatism is not just internal but rather plays on Turkish fears of external intervention. These fears date to the period when Russian and European imperial forces sought to incite the Kurdish tribes of Anatolia and Iraq against Ottoman rule. In 1923, after expelling the Great Powers and their local allies, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic. The republic's *raison d'etre* was the prevention of ethnic separatism.

The Kemalists used two related techniques to consolidate Turkish cohesion. One was the creation of a single, homogenous society out of the multiethnic Muslim population of Anatolia. Overall, assimilation proved a remarkable success, save for the Kurds. The second technique was to foster the determination to crush any separatism. Military officers in particular were inculcated with that mindset.

Consequently, Turkish security officials understand the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) not as a product of internal dissatisfaction but as a tool of outside powers, including the United States and the European Union.

While Turkish officials acknowledge that Kurdish separatism is linked to the underdevelopment of Kurdish society, Ankara's response has historically been continuous repression and limited efforts to overcome socio-economic problems, fighting separatism while denying recognition of Kurdish identity.

The unsuccessful war waged by the PKK from 1984 to 1999 politicized the Kurds, however, signaling the persistence of a distinct Kurdish identity and the failure of homogenization. Some Turkish politicians began to call for accommodating this identity. Although the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 led to a respite in PKK assertiveness, Turkey's bid to join the EU and the possibility of a Kurdish state in Iraq have put Kurdish independence back on the agenda.

Yet Ankara cannot easily recognize Kurdish ethnicity formally and fully, since that would mean renouncing a fundamental tenet of the republic. Given the multiple centrifugal tensions in

Turkey, its relatively undeveloped civil society, and the fundamental instability of its neighborhood, recognition of the Kurds would be not merely revolutionary but also very risky.

Most Turks are not willing to run such a risk. Fear for the future of the republic has stimulated a marked upswing in Turkish nationalism since 2003. The Kurds are among this new nationalism's primary targets. Public sentiment favors harsh action against Kurdish separatists and an invasion of northern Iraq.

Recently, the rhetoric of Kurdish leaders inside Turkey has been almost as unyielding. Öcalan himself and the PKK remain powerful symbols for a significant number of Kurds. Additionally, some Kurds have been in the process of creating a nationalism that mirrors Turkish nationalism in its militancy.

All of these developments have deeply unsettled the Turkish military, which itself has responded by encouraging aggressive public nationalist sentiment. Turkish warnings about a military intervention in Iraq cannot be lightly dismissed as bluffs. Great Power intervention in the name of liberation, the establishment of small ethnic states along the Turkish border, and the inciting of guerrilla and terrorist acts nearby – combined with outside pressure for reform and concessions to minorities inside Turkey – bring to mind the partitioning of Ottoman territory throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many Turkish officers accuse the United States of backing the PKK.

Ankara's ability to respond creatively to its Kurdish dilemma is limited. The Turkish Republic rests on Kemalism, of which Turkish nationalism is an intrinsic part. A solution to the Kurdish Question does not look possible, barring a systemic change in Turkish politics. At the same time, Turkish will to control and dominate the Kurdish southeast shows no real sign of flagging, while the Kurds have no prospects to seriously challenge Ankara's control. Thus it is quite possible for the status quo, as unstable as it might be in principle, to continue for some time.

INTRODUCTION

The future status of the Kurds of Turkey constitutes the most serious and troubling challenge facing the Turkish Republic. The Kurdish Question dominates Turkish security concerns and hangs over both Turkish foreign relations and domestic politics. It has been a central factor in Turkish politics throughout the twentieth century, and its importance is only increasing.

The Kurds are a transnational population, and reside in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia. They are linguistically and ethnically distinct from Turks. No exact data exists on the numbers of Kurds, but the best estimates suggest that they number as many as 30 million. Of these, roughly half live in Turkey where they make up between 15% and 20% of the total population, or 10.5 to 14.2 million. They are the second largest ethnic group in Turkey after Turks, and most indicators suggest they are growing more quickly. They are compactly settled in the southeast of Turkey where they account for 50% to 80% of the population, although large populations of Kurds now are found in all major Turkish cities and especially Istanbul.

The Kurdish Question is not a new one, but arose in the nineteenth century when the Ottoman Empire, seeking to centralize authority, engaged in a struggle with the Kurdish tribes of Anatolia and Iraq. At this same time, the Great Powers of Europe also began to take an active interest in the Kurds, at times encouraging them to revolt against Ottoman rule. This pattern of Great Power exploitation of internal fissures had been used with great effect to drive the Ottomans out of the Balkans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1923, after waging a successful war to drive the Great Powers and their local Greek and Armenian allies out of Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic. Above all else, Kemal and his circle of supporters, who hailed disproportionately from the officer corps, were determined to prevent this new state from repeating the Ottoman experience of partition through Great Power exploitation of internal fissures. Indeed, the very *raison d'etre* of the republic they founded was precisely the prevention of even the possibility of ethnic separatism.

They sought to do this through two overlapping ways. One was the creation of a single, homogenous Turkish society from the multiethnic Muslim population of Anatolia. In support of the goal of assimilating the Muslims of Anatolia, the republic declared all Muslims inside its borders to be Turks – thereby denying in principle the right of outside powers to intervene on behalf of ethnic minorities – and banned any expressions of ethnic identity other than Turkish. This politicization of ethnic identity was new and marks the transformation of the Kurdish Question from one of tribal resistance to state authority to a primarily ethno-national one.

The second way the republic's founders sought prevent separatism was to burn into the republic's institution a deep-seated determination to crush any attempt or even hint at separatism. Military officers, whose presence looms large in Turkish politics and who regard themselves as the ultimate guardians and guarantors of the republican order, in particular were inculcated with a world-view akin to paranoia on the issue of separatism. That mindset remains in place today, and Turkish security officials overwhelmingly conceive of the Kurdish Question as one of exploitation by outside powers. They understand the Kurdistan Workers Party (known more

commonly by its Kurdish acronym PKK), with which they have been fighting since 1984, not as a product of internal dissatisfaction but as a tool of outside powers, including the United States and the European Union, manipulated to keep Turkey off-balance at best and to partition Turkey at worst.

Outside of military circles, Turkish officialdom acknowledges that the Kurdish Question possesses a secondary dimension, namely that Kurdish separatism is linked to the socio-economic underdevelopment of Kurdish society. According to this view, the Kurds' tribal structure, low rate of literacy, and lack of economic opportunity combine to form a population that is dissatisfied, frustrated, and prone to political manipulation by religious and tribal elites who for their own purposes incite the Kurdish masses against state authorities. This analysis of the Kurdish Question is not new and dates back to the late nineteenth century. It has in its favor the fact that it is partially true and that it does not require recognition of the existence of ethnicity as a factor.

Ankara's response to Kurdish dissatisfaction has been consistent throughout the history of the Turkish Republic: continuous repression by force coupled with limited efforts to overcome socio-economic backwardness in Turkey's southeast. It has thus far been successful in defeating separatism and denying recognition to Kurdish identity. Nonetheless, the war waged by the PKK between 1984 and 1999 posed the most severe challenge to the Republic's unity in its history. Despite the fact that the PKK failed in its bid to win independence or even autonomy, the scale of its struggle successfully politicized Kurdish identity among the Kurds. The emergence of the PKK signaled the persistent existence of a distinct Kurdish identity and the failure of the Republic to homogenize Anatolia.

By the end of the 1990s Turkish politicians began to call in public for acknowledging and accommodating Kurdish ethnicity. Even officials of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization implicitly suggested this in public statements calling for Kurdish language broadcasts. Although the retreat of the PKK following the capture of its "Great Leader" Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 relieved temporarily some of the Kurdish Question's urgency, Turkey's bid to join the EU and especially the possibility of a Kurdish state emerging in Iraq have put it back on the agenda, both permitting and compelling Turkish politicians and others to address it. The taboo against acknowledging the existence of the Kurds as a distinct, non-Turkish ethnic group inside Turkey gradually has dissipated.

Yet because the principle of Turkish nationalism is so central to the Kemalist ideology that legitimates the republic, official Ankara cannot easily recognize Kurdish ethnicity formally and fully. Doing so would mean renouncing a fundamental tenet of the republic and be tantamount to rejecting Kemalism. Everything from the republic's secular character through the role of the military to its geographic borders would be open to debate. The principle of the republic itself would be open to question. Given the multiple centrifugal tensions in Turkish society, its relatively undeveloped civil society, and – not least – the fundamental instability of its neighborhood, recognition of Kurdish identity would be not merely revolutionary but also very risky.

Most Turks are not willing to run such a risk, especially given the very uncertain state of affairs in Iraq and the possibility of a Kurdish state emerging. So worrisome is the current international situation that the director of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization publicly warned of the need for Turkey to take unspecified action to avoid the fate of dissolution that he predicted would befall several states in the coming era. This fear for the future of the republic has stimulated a marked upswing in aggressive Turkish nationalism since 2003. The Kurds, both Turkey's and those outside Turkey, are among this new nationalism's primary targets. Public sentiment is in favor of harsh action against Kurdish separatists, and supports the idea of an invasion of northern Iraq.

The rhetoric of Kurdish leaders inside Turkey in the recent year has been almost as unyielding. One Kurdish party official boldly warned that any Turkish attack on the northern Iraqi city of Kerkuk would be considered by Turkey's Kurds as equivalent to an attack on Diyarbakir. Others insist on employing the honorific term of "sayın," a polite term of address meaning "esteemed" or "honorable," when referring to Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned head of the PKK and a man passionately loathed by the vast majority of Turks. Öcalan himself and the PKK remain powerful symbols of Kurdish aspirations for a significant number of Kurds. In short, some Kurds have been in the process of creating a nationalism that mirrors Turkish nationalism in its militancy.

All of these developments have deeply unsettled the Turkish military, which itself has responded by encouraging aggressive public nationalist sentiment. The warnings and threats of the Turkish military to intervene militarily in Iraq cannot be lightly or easily dismissed as bluffs. Their paranoia is real, not simulated. Again, the *raison d'etre* of the Turkish Republic is to prevent ethno-separatism, and the military understands its duty as guardians of the Republic to be a sacred one. The events unfolding in and around Iraq – Great Power intervention in the name of liberation, the establishment of new, small states on ethnic lines on Turkish border, and the inciting of guerrilla and terrorist acts on the other side of the Turkish border combined with outside pressure for reform and concessions to minorities inside Turkey – recall precisely the same template that accompanied the partitioning of Ottoman territory throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Turkish armed forces have always cultivated a suspicion of western powers, including the United States, and many openly accuse the United States of backing the PKK. It would be a safe bet to say that many, perhaps most, Turkish officers regard the United States as a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the Turkish Republic. The Kurds, in any event, do constitute the greatest threat to the Turkish Republic and the possibility aggressive action by the Turkish armed forces, including clashes with American armed forces, therefore cannot be ruled out.

Independent of what occurs in Iraq, the Kurdish Question will continue to pose the biggest and the most intractable problem facing the Turkish Republic today. Overall the Republic's assimilationist project has proven a remarkable success. Outside of the Kurds, there are no minority groups whose existence can in any way be said to seriously compromise Turkish claims of homogeneity. Because of their large numbers and compact settlement patterns, however, the Kurds of Turkey defied the possibility of assimilation. Today they remain a large and inassimilable minority. Moreover, they suffer from a complex of disadvantages, ranging from official non-recognition of their ethnicity and language to generally much lower standards of

living, education, economic opportunities, and government services. As a result, dissatisfaction among Kurds has been widespread. It will remain a serious impediment to Turkish domestic political reform and to the establishment of close ties both Turkey's immediate neighbors as well as its more distant partners, the European Union and the United States, whose criticism of Turkish treatment of the Kurds rouses suspicion and hostility among Turkish officials and the public alike.

Ankara's ability to respond creatively to its Kurdish dilemma is limited. The Turkish Republic rests on Kemalism, and Turkish nationalism is an intrinsic part of Kemalism. Therefore, it cannot easily be rejected or modified without throwing the whole republican order into question. A solution to the Kurdish Question does not look possible, barring a systemic change in Turkish politics. At the same time, Turkish will to control and dominate the Kurdish southeast shows no real sign of flagging, while the Kurds have no prospects to seriously challenge Ankara's control. Moreover, patterns of migration, both voluntary and forced, and economic integration also render any proposed division of Anatolia into "Turkish" and "Kurdish" parts more problematic than ever. Thus it is quite possible for the status quo, as unstable as it might be in principle, to continue for some time.

After providing a brief introduction to the Kurds, the paper traces the evolution of the Kurdish Question from its beginnings as a matter of tribal vs., central state authority in eastern Anatolia in the sixteenth century through its internationalization in the late Ottoman period to its ethno-nationalization in the latter part of the twentieth century. Although the paper focuses on the political dynamics, as these are the most critical in understanding the impact of the Kurdish Question, it also addresses the underlying social, economic, and demographic aspects and how these have changed.

THE KURDS: A BASIC OVERVIEW

Who are the Kurds? The Kurds are indigenous peoples of the Middle East who speak a set of Persianate, Indo-European languages. Most Kurds speak one of two dialects, Kurmanji or Sorani. The vast majority of Turkey's Kurds, perhaps over 90%, speak Kurmanji, as do most Kurds in neighboring Syria, Iran, and Lebanon. Inside Iraq, the Kurds in the area of Mosul also speak Kurmanji, whereas the majority of Iraqi and Iranian Kurds speak Sorani. There are several other Kurdish languages or dialects, such as Zaza, Lur, or Gurani. Aside from Kurmanji, Zaza is the other dialect spoken in Turkey.

Although Kurmanji and Sorani are clearly related to each other and to the other Kurdish tongues, they are not mutually comprehensible; i.e. a speaker of Kurmanji will not be able to understand a speaker of Sorani without special training, and vice-versa. The difference between Kurmanji and Sorani has been compared to that between German and English.[1] The linguistic divisions among the Kurds are important to note because they belie the image conveyed in the news media of the Kurds as a clearly demarcated, single people. The reality is quite different. Clan and tribal affiliations are, in addition to language, another factor that has historically divided the Kurds and impeded Kurdish unity. Thus in Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) despite their names represent not so much differing political visions as much as clan and linguistic divisions. Members of the former are Sorani speakers while those of the latter are Kurmanji speakers. In Turkey, some Zaza speakers reject the label "Kurd" and insist they are a separate group altogether.[2]

The Kurds are, nonetheless, ethno-linguistically distinct from Iranians, Arabs, and Turks. The latter speak an Altaic language, not an Indo-European one, and began arriving in large numbers in the Middle East from Central Asia only in the eleventh century. The vast majority of Kurds both within Turkey and elsewhere are Sunni Muslims. Although the Kurds and Turks belong to different schools of Islamic jurisprudence, the Shafi and Hanafi respectively, their common Sunni Islamic faith has served, and continues to serve, as a force binding them together.[3]

Whereas religion has historically served to bind Kurds and Turks, it has also served to divide Kurds internally. Roughly 10% of Turkey's Kurds are Alevis, meaning that they practice an

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[1] Philip Kreyenbroek, *The Kurds; A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992). Michael Gunter writes that Sorani and Kurmanji speakers can understand each other, albeit with difficulty. Michael Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 122.

[2] Martin van Bruinessen, "Nationalisme kurde et ethnicities intra-kurdes," *Peuples Méditerranéens* no. 68-69 (1994): 11-12. Making things more complicated still is the fact that some Zaza speakers consider themselves Alevi Turks. Gunter, *Historical Dictionary*, 43.

[3] Islam continues to inform Turkish-Kurdish cooperation to this day, much to the disapproval of religion shared by many Kurdish and Turkish activists. See, for example, "AKP'de Kürt Nakşi Partisi Var," *Özgür Gündem* 1.01.2007.

offshoot of Shi'a Islam that Sunnis have traditionally regarded as highly suspect. As a result, the Alevi Kurdish (and Turkish) minority was subjected to persecution at the hands of Sunnis during the Ottoman period. The introduction of secular rule under the Turkish Republic alleviated tensions between Alevis and Sunnis only somewhat. Just as more religious Sunni Turks and Kurds tend to support right-wing movements and causes, Alevis are disproportionately represented in leftist groups.

The Kurds of Tunceli (formerly Dersim) in central eastern Anatolia are predominantly Alevi. Their presence in Tunceli is not coincidental. It is a rugged, mountainous, and relatively inaccessible place; i.e. it is an environment that can shelter a minority from state persecution. Significantly, Tunceli today continues to honor its tradition of defiance of state authority. It is a district with historically high levels of violent anti-Turkish state activity. Whereas earlier religion served to pit the Alevi Kurds of Tunceli against the Ottoman state, today it is primarily the nationalist policies of the Turkish state that alienate them.

For most of their history, the Kurds have been a nomadic tribal people, and therefore often in conflict with state institutions up through the present day. The erection of borders between Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran in the wake of WWI divided many tribes. The tribes have resisted these partitions and many specialized in smuggling and other illegal cross-border activities. Although urbanization, migration, and other processes have weakened tribal ties considerably, those ties still play a role in the daily lives of many Kurds and in the politics of southeastern Turkey.

There is no solid information on the number of Kurds in Turkey. For reasons that will be discussed later, the Kurdish Question is extraordinarily sensitive in Turkey and it is all but impossible to collect demographic information through direct methods of research. Most estimates place the Kurds at somewhere between fifteen and twenty percent of Turkey's population; i.e. somewhere between 10.5 and 14 million. The Kurds of Turkey are compactly settled in the southeast of the country, with smaller numbers in the northeast. In the southeast, Kurds constitute the dominant ethnic element, with over 50 to upwards of 80% of the population of the southeastern districts.

Across the borders from these regions are significant populations of Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. For the past four decades, however, substantial numbers of Kurds have been migrating from the east to the west of Turkey. Although largely economic in origins, this influx has also been driven by what appears to have been a deliberate strategic policy of the Turkish state in the 1990s to depopulate significant swaths of the Turkish southeast today. Large numbers of Kurds live in the western parts of Anatolia, and particularly the larger cities of Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara. In fact, more Kurds perhaps live in Istanbul than any other city in the world.

ORIGINS OF THE KURDISH QUESTION

The Kurdish Question is not new. In some sense it can be said to date back to the early 16th century when Sultan Selim I turned the armies of the Ottomans from their heartland, western Anatolia and the Balkans, toward the newly emerging rival in the east, Safavid Persia. When Selim I led his army on campaign through eastern Anatolia he encountered a region dominated by Kurdish tribes. Some Kurds espoused Sunni Islam while others adhered to Alevi Islam, an offshoot of the Shi'ism of the Ottomans new rivals. Selim took the Sunni Kurds as allies and put the Alevi Kurds to the sword. After defeating the Safavid Shah Ismail I at the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, Selim then turned his attention to the south, marching against and overwhelming the Mamelukes in Palestine and Egypt.

Thereafter, whenever threats from the Safavids loomed, the Ottoman armies would return to campaign in eastern Anatolia. In general, however, the Ottoman center was content to leave the Kurds of eastern Anatolia to their own affairs. So long as the resident tribes paid allegiance in some form to the sultan, the Ottomans were content to let them manage local matters largely on their own. Eastern Anatolia, in effect, was something of a backwater in the empire. It had little intrinsic value, and was of interest mainly as a borderland buffer against Persia. Ottoman rule left a relatively light "footprint" in the Kurdish territories of eastern Anatolia and neighboring regions.

This situation changed radically in the nineteenth century, and it did so for two reasons. One is that this century saw the growth of modern communications such as the telegraph and railroad. These new tools gave the Ottoman center the ability to project power into eastern Anatolia at much lower costs. In short, eastern Anatolia was effectively no longer as remote as it had been in previous centuries.

Second, and more ominously, the nineteenth century saw a substantial growth in the involvement of the European powers in eastern Anatolia. Russian, British, French and later German missionaries, consuls, and military officers began taking an interest in the region, pushing into the region from the Levant, Iran, and the Caucasus. Missionaries opened schools, consuls opened consulates, and military officers began frequenting the region, sometimes undercover, sometimes with their armies in tow, as in the 1828 and 1877 Russo-Turkish wars when Russian armies advanced into eastern Anatolia.

As a large, armed, and tribally organized people on the Russian empire's expanding southern border, the Kurds were of great interest to the Imperial Russian government.[4] Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century commissioned a Russo-Kurdish dictionary and by the nineteenth

[4] Wadie Jwaideh, The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University, 2006), 115.

century St. Petersburg had become the world's leading center for Kurdology. St. Petersburg University established professorial chairs for the study of Kurdish. The Russian army's ranks of military ethnographers included highly accomplished Kurdologists, several of whom authored substantial works on the tribal structures of the Kurds as well as the positive and negative aspects of their role in the wars of Russia with the Ottomans and Persians.[5]

At the same time that Russia was driving the Ottomans and Persians out of the Caucasus, the Great Powers were steadily chipping away at Ottoman possessions elsewhere, from North Africa and Egypt to the Balkans. From the end of the eighteenth through the nineteenth century Ottoman armies suffered one defeat after another. European economic dominance was increasing as fast as its military superiority. In response to the multi-faceted challenge posed by the vastly more advanced European colonial powers, the Ottoman center in 1834 initiated a massive reform effort known as the *Tanzimat*, meaning simply "restructuring."[6]

Narrower, less ambitious efforts to reform the military had been undertaken pervious in fits and starts. The basic idea of the Tanzimat was to bring Ottoman institutions and laws up closer to the standards of a European state. In other words, a system of rationalized, centralized rule more akin to that of a modern nation-state was to replace the looser, more flexible Ottoman style whereby the center had accommodated local conditions. Pressed now on all fronts, however, the empire had to extract as many resources as efficiently as it could, and this required a process of centralization. Istanbul would now dispense with its traditional, more flexible style of rule and instead strive to impose direct rule upon its provinces. It is at this point that the Kurdish Question becomes an acute one.

In eastern Anatolia the local power structures, the tribal elites, resented the new efforts at centralization and resisted them. Before Ottoman rule could be centralized in eastern Anatolia, the tribes had to be subdued. Thus the Ottoman state found itself waging a struggle on two fronts simultaneously: the external front against its foreign enemies, and an internal front against impediments to domestic reform. The empire, however, had limited resources, and the need to apportion resources to both at the same time necessarily compelled the Ottoman state to compromise on its internal reform efforts. It could not do everything at once.

Although the Kurds were the dominant element in eastern Anatolia, they were not the only element. Close to one quarter of the population was Armenian. The Armenians were at a double disadvantage vis-à-vis the Kurds. First, they were sedentary, and as such were constant targets

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[5] The Imperial Russian army maintained a substantial cadre of officers trained in the languages and histories of "Asian" peoples such as the Kurds. A comprehensive reference work on these individual is M.K. Baskhanov, ed. *Russkie voennye vostokovedy: biobibliograficheskii slovar'* (Russian Military Orientalists: a Biographical Dictionary) (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2005).

[6] It is interesting to note that the Turkish word tanzimat has the same meaning as the Russian *perestroika*. The Ottoman and Soviet reform efforts hold some important similarities, among them being the stimulus of geopolitical competition.

for raids by the largely nomadic Kurds. Second, they were Christian, and thus the Kurds could attack them with relative impunity.

The plight of the Armenians became an international issue of Great Power interest at the same time that the Ottoman state was seeking to establish its control of eastern Anatolia. In 1877 the Russians and Ottomans went to war once again. That war saw Russia further expand its holdings on the Ottomans' northeastern flank, taking the provinces of Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi in lieu of reparations as part of the post-war settlement.

As another of their terms for peace, the Russians had demanded in 1877 that they be given authority as guarantors of Ottoman reforms to provide for greater security for the Armenians from the depredations of Kurds and Circassians.[7] The following year the other Great Powers stripped Russia of sole responsibility as nominal guardian of the Armenians. Russia could too easily exploit such a responsibility to intervene in eastern Anatolia. Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin thus required the Ottoman state to carry out said reforms and assigned responsibility for overseeing the implementation of such reforms to the Great Powers as a whole.

This act helped trigger the most serious Kurdish challenge to Istanbul's rule so far, the 1880 revolt of Shaykh Ubayd Allah. Reading the assignment of a special protected status to the Armenians as the first step to the creation of an independent Armenian state in the heart of Kurdistan, Ubayd Allah rose in rebellion. He recognized the shift in international diplomacy toward recognition of the right of ethnic groups to statehood, and he asserted to the British the right of the Kurd as a distinct people to possess some form of statehood on the other. Whether or not Ubayd Allah was a real nationalist is beside the point. He recognized the utility of making a nationalist claim. Large numbers of Kurds followed Ubayd Allah in revolt, and forced the Ottoman army to mobilize in response. Due in significant measure to the fractious nature of the Kurdish tribes, however, the rebellion petered out.[8]

Ubayd Allah's rebellion revealed three new realities. One was that the eastern Anatolia was no longer isolated from the processes of global politics. The Great Powers were taking an interest in the region and influencing local politics. The second was that ethnic groups could stake a legitimate claim to statehood in the global arena. The third was that the Kurds, although disunited, possessed a formidable capacity to defy state authority.

In other words, Istanbul would need significant effort and resources to overcome the Kurds and force them to submit to its will. Istanbul was pressed on multiple other fronts, however, and had to husband its resources. Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909) therefore opted to return to a policy of indirect rule in eastern Anatolia. Rather than expend scarce resources on fighting the Kurdish tribes and thereby risk driving them to make common cause with the Russians right across the

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[7] The Circassians were Muslim mountaineers expelled from the North Caucasus by Russia to the Ottoman Empire. They were resettled in eastern Anatolia and elsewhere.

[8] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 53-59.

border, Abdülhamid opted to co-op the tribes. In exchange for their profession of loyalty, the Sultan in 1891 made it possible for tribal chiefs to set up their own regiments.

Known eponymously as the "Hamidiye Regiments," these units were modeled in loose fashion on Russia's Cossacks. Their mission was to provide for security in the border regions in the east, meaning that they were expected to fight against the Russians in time of war and against Armenian revolutionaries in time of peace. Abdülhamid bestowed upon the chiefs titles and honors and supplied them with arms and funds for their regiments. No less important, he allowed these chiefs effective free reign in eastern Anatolia. The Kurds exploited their power and legitimacy to confiscate Armenian-owned land.

THE YOUNG TURKS AND THE KURDS: CENTRALIZATION AND RESETTLEMENT

The solution worked well enough, but Abdülhamid's inability to reverse the general pattern of Ottoman decline led to his overthrow in 1908 by the a group known popularly as the Young Turks. More accurately, the Young Turks represented the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), a conspiratorial political party dedicated to preserving the unity of the empire through progressive radical reforms. Believing that the shrinking empire had to maximize its resources, the CUP attempted to impose direct rule upon eastern Anatolia, subjecting Kurds to taxation and conscription as well as the authority of state-appointed officials, not tribal ones. Fear of foreign intervention also led the CUP initially to attempt to provide security for the Armenians and improve their conditions by returning land stolen by Kurds. First among their initiatives was to disband the Hamidiye Regiments.

Not surprisingly, the majority of the Kurds reacted negatively to the rise of the CUP. Several leading Kurdish shaykhs and regiment commanders crossed into Iran and began to look to the Russians for support. Over the next several years, rebellions and revolts shook eastern Anatolia. The rebels' inability to coordinate and cooperate across tribal lines, however, enabled Istanbul to contain and suppress the uprisings one by one.

Sitting across the borders in the Caucasus and occupied northern Iran, Russian diplomats and military officials noted the increasing tension between the Ottoman Kurds and Istanbul. They decided to exploit it, using their consulates in the region to hold secret meetings with Kurdish notables and supplying money and arms to Kurdish rebels. They led the Kurds to believe that under Russian rule they would retain autonomy and would see the restoration of the tribal privileges they had lost under the CUP.

All of the Great Powers believed that the final partition was just a matter of time. The only question was how it would be partitioned. By establishing ties with Ottoman Kurds, the Russians sought to create a pro-Russian constituency that would bolster the Russian position against the British, Germans, and French, all of who were also increasingly active in the area recruiting local allies. Russia's proximity and its institutionalized knowledge of the Kurds gave it a tremendous advantage. The Russians helped foment unrest in eastern Anatolia, particularly in the wake of the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars. Their goal was to achieve the separation of the eastern or so-called Armenian provinces from the Ottomans and put them under Russian control.[9]

The ability of the small, newly emerging Balkan states to inflict decisive defeats upon the Ottomans indicated that the final destruction of the Ottoman Empire was imminent. In preparation for this contingency, the Russians increased their cooperation with Ottoman Kurds.

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[9] Jwaideh, 118.

At the same time as they were encouraging the Kurds to rebel against Ottoman rule, they began to threaten Istanbul with military intervention unless the Ottomans introduced reforms and ensured the tranquility of eastern Anatolia.

Faced with Kurdish defections and violent opposition, the CUP sought to counter Kurdish hostility through a mix of measures. They backed off some of their more burdensome reforms, such as land redistribution. They reinstated the Hamidiye regiments in an altered form. They exploited tribal fissures among the Kurds by choosing to back the rivals of pro-Russian leaders.

Thus when Abdurrezzak of the famous Bedirhan clan threw in his lot with the Russians (in large part out of a desire to reclaim land taken by the Ottoman government by his family), the CUP recruited Shaykh Abdulqadir to their side. The fact that Abdulqadir was secretly engaged in talks with the Russians on the eve of WWI, seeking guarantees that they would assure him the leading position in post-war Kurdistan in exchange for his support, demonstrates that inter-tribal rivalries were often more important than religious ties, ideology, or other considerations. This remains true to this day among the Kurds of Turkey, who sometimes chose sides in the war between the PKK and the Turkish Republic along tribal affiliations.

WWI led to a radical reshaping of eastern Anatolia's demographics. The Armenian population was thoroughly decimated by deportations and massacres. Although many of the important details are still not clear to researchers, it appears that in 1915 the immediate threat of a Russian invasion from the east and British and French pressure from the Dardanelles in the south triggered a decision to forcibly relocate the Armenian population, whose loyalties were highly suspect. This provided ample opportunities for the Kurds to attack their fiercest competitors for eastern Anatolia, and many Kurds availed themselves of the chance to plunder and destroy columns of Armenian deportees, who had been dispatched on what were effectively death marches.

The destruction of the Armenian population also served a longer-term security goal. The presence of the Christian Armenians on Ottoman soil had become a constant source of difficulty for the Ottoman state. The Armenians were Christians, and as such could claim the sympathies of European missionaries and their societies back home. Many Armenians lived on Kurdish-owned land in miserable conditions not much different from serfdom. Yet their rising levels of education and economic success at the beginning of the twentieth century alarmed the Kurds, who were accustomed to seeing the Armenians as their religious and social inferiors. They now feared that the Armenians, with Great Power assistance, might emerge as their overlords. Armenian and Kurdish villages and settlements were thoroughly intermixed and the lands claimed for a greater Armenia overlapped the greater part of any putative Kurdistan.

Armenian revolutionaries in the late 19th century had begun waging campaigns of terror and resistance against the Ottoman government and Kurds alike, keeping the region in a state of constant turmoil. The program of the revolutionaries was the classic one of provoking the state to retaliate harshly. In this case the hope was that Ottoman reprisals would not merely radicalize the Armenian population at large and drive them into the revolutionaries' camp but, more importantly, it would ultimately compel Great Power intervention on the Armenians' behalf.

As the Treaty of Berlin stated explicitly, the Great Powers held the Ottomans responsible for the security of the Armenians and reserved the right to intervene in the event that this security was not guaranteed. Violations of Armenian security provided a ready-made pretext for Great Power military operations in the form of "humanitarian intervention." The presence of the Armenians vastly complicated attempts at modernizing and centralizing reform. The Kurds sought to contain them, and resented Istanbul's efforts to protect them, and their existence in Anatolia presented a persistent, structural challenge to Ottoman claims of legitimate sovereignty. The destruction of the Armenians during the war thus solved a short-term, wartime security problem and removed a long-term obstacle to reform and Ottoman sovereignty.

In the short-term the Kurds, too, saw a competitor for dominance in eastern Anatolia removed. During the war many, but far from all, Kurdish tribes fought on the side of the Ottomans. Others switched sides according to whichever army seemed to pose the least risk or promised the greater advantage.

THE TURKISH REPUBLIC AND THE KURDISH QUESTION: FROM TRIBAL TO ETHNO-NATIONAL PROBLEM

Although the Ottoman Empire was defeated in WWI, the collapse of the Russian Empire and the destruction of the Armenians left the Turks and the Kurds as sole contenders for control of eastern Anatolia with a real presence on the ground. Nonetheless, the victorious allies powers prepared to partition Anatolia. In the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 they agreed to allot northeastern Anatolia from Van in the south to Trabzon in the north to the Republic of Armenia. Southeastern Anatolia was to be made into an autonomous Kurdish entity that would be granted full sovereignty and independence when it was judged ready of self-government. Greece was to receive western Anatolia around Izmir, while a rump Ottoman-Turkish state would be restricted largely to central Anatolia.

The specter of partition and the advance of Greek and Armenian troops, however, jolted the great majority of Muslims of Anatolia – Turks, Kurds, Circassians, and others – to join ranks under the leadership of former Ottoman General Mustafa Kemal. The Sunni Muslims understood that no further retreat was possible. Either they make a last stand now or they submit. Thus, despite their exhaustion from the preceding years of total warfare, they committed themselves to further warfare. Using pre-existing networks of former Ottoman military and intelligence officers who had gone underground after the war, Kemal built a popular resistance movement and fielded an army to defy the planned partition.

Sevres' promise of an autonomous Kurdish entity meant little to the Kurds. National sentiment was still weak among the Kurds, who were overwhelmingly illiterate. The post-war partition scheme moreover, would divide Kurdistan between several states and subject most Kurds to outside rule. Mustafa Kemal's call to fight the infidel Greeks and Armenians under the banner of Islam found much greater resonance among the Kurds, and the majority threw their support to Kemal and his circle. The bonds of Islam were still quite strong.

Kemal's "nationalists" drove the Armenians back in the east and drove out the Greeks in the west. Britain, France, and Italy withdrew their forces from Anatolia, and in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 they all recognized Turkey as an independent, sovereign state. With the exception of the province of Mosul, which remained part of British-controlled Iraq, Kemal obtained all the territorial objectives identified by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) in its National Pact of 1920.[10]

[10] The Hatay, or Alexandretta province, was ceded from Syria by the French to Turkey in 1939.

The establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, however, turned out for the Kurds to be a double disaster. First, the republic was declared to be strictly secular. In a series of rapid and radical reforms, the TGNA abolished the post of Caliph, severely reduced the number of religious schools and put the rest under state control, and outlawed the Sufi orders. Other symbolic reforms, such as the switch from Arabic to the Latin alphabet and the banning of the Fez, were just as offensive to pious Muslim sentiment. Second, the republic adopted a rigorously Turkish nationalist ideology. "Turk" became the single permissible identity for Muslim citizens of the Turkish Republic (the Treaty of Lausanne guaranteed the identities only of the miniscule numbers of Christian Greeks and Armenians and Jews who remained).

The motivation behind the nationalist ideology of the Turkish Republic was not ethnic chauvinism. Instead, it was the product of a conscious and deliberate determination to prevent the new state from following the fate of its Ottoman predecessor. The lesson that the new Turkish elites had derived from the recent past was that ethnic diversity had been the great weakness of the Ottoman Empire. Ethnic diversity not only impeded the attainment of internal unity and cohesion but what is no less important, it had provided outside powers a permanent pretext to divide and partition the empire. The Great Powers had done this successfully with the Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Montenegrins, Albanians, and Arabs and had very nearly managed to do it with the Armenians and Kurds. By declaring its Muslim population to be ethnically homogenous, the new republic sought to preempt the possibility of future Great Power interference justified on the pretext of defending the rights of ethnic minorities.

The republican authorities did not restrict their efforts to formal statements. They also sought to promote and enforce the assimilation of ethnic non-Turks into Turks. This impulse toward assimilation in fact predated the republic. In the empire's final years the CUP had already identified ethnic diversity as a vulnerability and took steps to promote assimilation and homogenization. Thus during WWI, the CUP effectively consigned the Armenians to oblivion through deportations, and engaged in smaller scale deportations and resettlements of Muslims – Kurds, Circassians, Albanians and others. The regulations governing the deportations stipulated that the ethnicity of the deportees constitute no more than ten percent of the population of the district to where they were deported. By breaking up concentrations of ethnic minorities and scattering those minorities among the Turkish population the CUP had hoped to promote their long-term assimilation.[11]

The elimination of the Armenian and Greek populations from Anatolia during the years of WWI and the Turkish War of Independence had gone a long toward the homogenization of Anatolia. Now the Kurds were the only large, compactly settled non-Turkish group in Anatolia. The containment of Kurdish identity and the promotion of the Turkification of the Kurds thus became a prime objective of the Turkish Republic.

The establishment of a secular and emphatically *Turkish* republic inevitably disillusioned and embittered the Kurds who had joined with Kemal and now felt betrayed. Ankara, however, was

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[11] Fuat Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskân Politikası* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001).

unyielding in its commitment to establishing Turkishness as the sole identity of the republic's citizens and was ever alert to signs of separatism. Thus in the first years of the republic when Ankara got wind of the plans of a Kurdish organization called *Azadi* to revolt in the name of an independent Kurdistan, it reacted swiftly. It exiled suspect Kurdish tribal leaders, intellectuals, and other potential nationalists to western Anatolia and banned the use of the Kurdish language.[12]

These measures only fed Kurdish resentment, and in March 1925, Shaykh Said of Palu declared a rebellion in the name of restoring caliphal rule. Shaykh Said was a prominent religious figure among the Kurds, and through marriages he also enjoyed close personal ties with many neighboring Kurdish chiefs. His call for an uprising was heard, and his supporters managed to seize the town of Elazığ (Harput).

This latest rebellion again revealed tribal and religious fissures among the Kurds. Although virtually all of the Zaza tribes as well as two large Kurmanji tribes heeded Shaikh Said's call, the Sunni overtones of the revolt, however, frightened the Alevi Kurds enough to and impelled them to take up arms against the insurgents. The rebels were unable to seize any other major centers such as Diyarbakir or Malatya.[13]

Anatolia's mountainous terrain blocked a quick deployment of Turkish Army units, and forced Ankara to obtain permission from France to move its troops on the Baghdad railway through Syria into southeastern Anatolia. In early April, the Turkish army met and defeated Shaykh Said's force, squelching the rebellion.

The Turkish authorities did not rest after the military victory but undertook a range of punitive measures. In September they hanged Shaykh Said and forty-six others in Diyarbakir. This act provoked fresh rebellions in Bitlis, Mush, and Hakkari, but Turkish security forces put these down in short order. So-called "Independence Tribunals" then moved throughout the southeast, arresting some 7,500 suspect rebels and executing 660 of them. State authorities decided at this time to also target the underlying structures of Kurdish society. Declaring their determination to extirpate "the remnants of feudalism" they sought to break the power of Kurdish shaykhs and aghas by razing whole villages, exiling Kurdish notables, and deporting up to 500,000 Kurds from the east over the course of the next three years.[14]

In the eyes of Turkish officials, the Shaykh Said rebellion brought together several bugbears from the recent Ottoman past. One was the specter of foreign subversion. In his indictment of Shaikh Said, the Turkish prosecutor compared the uprising to those that had taken place in the formerly Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Balkans. Accusations were made

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[12] Jwaideh, 204

[13] Erik Jan Zurcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 178.

[14] Jwaideh, 206; McDowall, 196-197.

that the British had incited the rebellion. Britain did benefit from the rebellion, as the demonstration of Kurdish dissatisfaction with Turkish rule undermined Turkish claims to Mosul, helping secure the League of Nations' approval for the assignment of Mosul to Iraq. Although no evidence has ever been produced to demonstrate this charge of British involvement, many Turks accept it to this day.

A second bugbear was that of resurgent Islamism. The religious overtones of the uprising, in fact, probably frightened Ankara much more than the nationalist aspects. Not only was national sentiment still relatively weak among the masses of Kurds, its appeal was inherently limited to Kurds. Islam, however, had the potential to rouse not just Kurds, but Turks as well. Shaykh Said enjoyed renown as a Naqshbandi shaykh and had made his call for rebellion in the name of restoring the caliph. Thus in the wake of the rebellion Turkish authorities shut down all dervish convents and banned the dervish brotherhoods throughout Turkey.

The third bugbear was that of the Kurds' social structure. The Turks labeled Kurdish society – with its tribes, *aghast*, and shaykhs, as inherently backward and feudal. The Kurds were overwhelmingly tribal, and their tribal chiefs, the *agha*s, held enormous sway over the mass of Kurds. Their status as chiefs was typically reinforced by their position as landlords. The vast majority of Kurds were impoverished nomads or peasants who tended small plots of land. As such, they were heavily dependent upon the *agha*s for their livelihood.

The other important source of authority among the Kurds was the dervish brotherhoods, the *tariqat*s, led by the shaykhs. Although the founders of shaykhly lines acquired their authority through their religious works and demonstrations of piety, they and their successors frequently bolstered their authority through marriage. Thus, the lines and persons of aghas and shaykhs often overlapped. One result was that wealth was further concentrated in the hands of the tribal elite.[15]

In addition to being destitute, the great majority of Kurds were illiterate and lacking in education. They had a highly mystical conception of Islam and were often extremely superstitious.[16] Most Kurds trusted and believed in the miraculous abilities claimed by their shaykhs. Charismatic shaykhs possessed extraordinary influence over their followers. The shaykh's command could be enough to bring them to revolt, or even to throw themselves to death.[17]

For the nationalist, secularist, and modernist Kemalists, then, the Kurds and their primitive society presented a nightmare. The Kemalists' ambition was to transform post-Ottoman Anatolia into a modern nation-state with rationalized institutions along the lines of those in

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[15] Jwaideh, 48-50.

[16] Martin van Bruinessen, *Mullas, Sufis, and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000), 24.

[17] Minorsky, "Kurds," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1986).

western Europe, all the while maintaining uncompromised sovereignty. The presence of the Kurds, however, was a rebuke to the Kemalist vision of an ethnically homogenous society. Their strong attachment to superstition represented the worst of religious belief, and their feudal structure ensured their stagnation. Not surprisingly, the word Kurd acquired sharply pejorative connotations among the Turkish elite. Indeed, many Turkish children in western Anatolia were even taught that Kurds had tales.

Since the Shaykh Said rebellion, the Turkish state has pursued a dual track solution to the Kurdish Question. One part of this solution was simple repression. Not only did the republic ban Kurdish political parties, but it banned also the existence of any organization bearing a Kurdish identity. The mere mention in public of the existence of a separate Kurdish ethnicity was made a punishable offense. These strictures were not uniquely applied to Kurdish identity, but applied to all expressions of non-Turkish identity. Given their numbers, however, the Kurds were the chief targets and primary victims.

Officially, Turkish authorities and scholars declared that the Kurds were in fact of the same ethnic stock as the Turks. The most famous formulation of this thesis referred to the Kurds as "mountain Turks." This notion explained that the name *Kürt* refers to the sound of snow crunched under foot; i.e. the sound that Turks living in the snow-bound mountains would make as they walked.

During the first several decades of the republic, Turkish security forces cracked down harshly at any sign of disorder. The state routinely employed deportations, razed villages, and imposed martial law in Kurdish provinces. Maintaining order in southeastern Anatolia effectively became the military's primary mission. Of the eighteen military engagements it fought between 1924 and 1938, seventeen were in the Kurdish region. And after 1945, with the exception of the Korean War and the 1972 invasion of Cyprus, all Turkish military operations were directed at the Kurds.[18]

The second part of the solution consisted of efforts to change the nature of Kurdish identity and underlying structures of Kurdish society. Schools were built with the expectation that they would weaken Kurdish identity by socializing Kurdish children in Turkish nationalism and making formerly illiterate Kurds literate in Turkish (Turkish, of course, was the sole language of instruction).[19] By promoting a modern and more scientific worldview the schools would render the population less gullible and vulnerable to exploitation by "rabble-rousing" shaykhs and aghas.

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[18] McDowall, 198.

[19] Turkish schools did succeed in establishing Turkish as the primary language of communication for educated Kurds. One of the ironies of the PKK is that, as captured videos from their training camps reveal, they even write their slogans in Turkish, not Kurdish.

In 1934 the Turkish Parliament passed a law obliging all Turkish citizens to take surnames. Further, the Turkish state regulated choices for both first names and surnames, and permitted names of a purely Muslim or Turkish nature. Names that betrayed a non-Turkish identity were forbidden. Thus old Turkish names like Orhan or Tansu are, along with Muslim names such as Mustafa and Ahmed are permitted, Kurdish names such as Kumaran or Mervan are not. As mentioned earlier, Ankara banned the dervish brotherhoods. Such efforts and reforms were not restricted to the Kurds or to the southeast; they applied to the country as a whole. But they had a special significance for the Kurds.

Turkish policymakers early on recognized both the need to develop Kurdistan economically as well as the potential for using economic transformation to promote the assimilation of the Kurds, in particular to break the hold of the *agha*s on Kurdish society. The problem was that the Turkish state lacked the resources to universalize primary school education, led alone to undertake measures such as land reform that might have broken the hold of the *agha*s on Kurdish society. Consequently, the Kurdish provinces made relatively little economic progress and continued to lag according to all standards of development, such as literacy, industrialization, productivity etc. Repression of the crude sort remained the primary tool for Ankara to ensure the inclusion of the southeast within Turkey.

In fact, Turkey's democratization only strengthened Kurdish traditional social structures. The introduction of openly contested popular elections in 1950 actually bolstered the power and importance of the shaykhs and aghas. They could now translate their influence over their followers and peasants into political capital. With a word they could deliver large numbers of votes, and in exchange for those votes they obtained special favors from politicians, and were thus able to leverage their influence even further.

Thus, for example, in the 1950s many aghas traded the votes of their villagers for tractors, seed, and the construction of access roads by the government. They then used the tractors to drive down labor costs so that they could displace their own peasants and force them to sell what land they still owned and turn them into sharecroppers. Because the aghas' power now depended in part on the ability to deliver votes in elections, they would sometimes provide landless Kurds a plot of land just large enough to prevent them from migrating to cities. Whereas an observer might have expected that the introduction of tractors would have stimulated economic development and raised the status of the average Kurd vis-à-vis the old order, precisely the opposite happened. Democracy and technology worked together to strengthen feudal structures.

Nonetheless, destabilizing changes were taking place in the Kurdish regions. The entry for the first time of significant numbers of Kurds into universities in the 1960s stimulated political activity. Exposed both to new political ideas and the growing political conflicts brewing in the rest of Turkey at the time, many young Kurds began to discover both their own Kurdish identity and to think about political alternatives to their current plight. Because formal Kurdish organizations were still illegal, many politicized Kurds gravitated to left-wing movements. Although Turkish leftists did not embrace the Kurdish national cause per se, they did offer some sympathy for the plight of the great numbers of impoverished Kurds. This was particularly true for the Alevi Kurds, who found in left-wing causes both validation of their own traditions of resistance toward the state and ideological support for their aversion to Sunni Islam. Other

Kurds, however, looked to Islam and its emphasis on shared faith, not ethnicity, as the primary bond of the community.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF KURDISH ACTIVISM

The 1960s and especially the 1970s were a time of intense political turmoil inside Turkey. No single party or cohesive bloc of parties was able to secure dominance in Turkey's multiparty parliamentary system, and Turkish politics remained deadlocked throughout the two decades. Yet at precisely the same time Turkish society was experiencing major changes. Population growth, migration to urban centers, industrialization, rising educational levels and other factors all put great strain on the political system which was simply incapable of reacting fast enough and accommodating the new emerging constituencies and their demands. The global popularity of revolutionary left-wing ideologies and the supply of arms from outside collided with the determination of Turkist and Islamist groups on the right to combat Communism and separatist movements, or, more prosaically, to halt domestic reforms that might undermine their positions. Many Kurdish aghas who feared leftist criticism made common cause with Turkish and Islamist rightists to squelch advocates of socialism. Violent strife between leftists and rightists steadily grew and by 1980 Turkey was on the verge of a civil war. Only the military coup of 1980 and imposition of martial law stopped it.

Although the labels "leftist" and "rightist" are commonly employed to describe the contending sides in the strife, the reality is that these terms were often covers for other sectarian conflicts, in particular Alevis vs. Sunnis, or for conflicts defined along regional or local identities. In Turkey it is not unusual for even third-generation city dwellers to identify with the village from where their father's family came. Immigrants from villages often settled compactly on the outskirts of cities and relied upon their fellow transplants for assistance and networking. These ties often channeled violence as well as cooperation.[20] Although the Kurdish Question remained in the background during the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, a Kurdish movement was beginning to form.

Population growth in the Kurdish regions remained robust throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Between 1940 and 1965 the Kurdish population grew at a rate 25% faster than the Turkish. And in 1965, 48% of the population in the Kurdish region was under age 15, compared to 41% for the country as a whole.[21]

The mechanization of the Kurdish regions stimulated urban migration, creating for the first time a large urban Kurdish constituency. The city of Diyarbakir, for example, grew from a mere 30,000 inhabitants in 1930 to 140,000 in 1970 and 400,000 in 1990. Diyarbakir today represents the center of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey and is often called the unofficial capital of a would-be greater Kurdistan.

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[20] Hamit Bozarslan, *Violence in the Middle East: From Political Struggle to Self-Sacrifice* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2004), 74.

[21] McDowall, 403-404.

Kurdish migration impacted the cities of western Anatolia as well. In fact over 40% of Kurdish immigrants made Istanbul their home (thereby making Istanbul the city with the largest Kurdish population in the world). This, however, did not necessarily bode well for assimilation, at least in the short term. The new migrants tended to settle en masse in new districts rather than dispersing in small numbers throughout the cities.

Whereas the Kurdish countryside with its illiterate peasants and domineering aghas provided an infertile environment for the development of nationalist sentiment and activism, the cities nurtured a nationally conscious Kurdish intelligentsia.[22] Urban life brought the Kurds into daily contact with Turks and the principles of Turkish nationalism.

Developments outside Turkey in neighboring countries also had an impact on Kurdish thinking. The Iraqi Revolution of 1958 and subsequent clashes there between Kurds and Turkmen as well as radio broadcasts in Kurdish from Yerevan in Soviet Armenia and Nasser's Cairo further stimulated the development of a Kurdish consciousness. Initially, activists, including a handful of Turkish parliamentarians, expressed this consciousness euphemistically in the form of "Eastism" (*Doğuculuk*), a call for more investment and development in the "southeast." They carefully avoided using the words "Kurd" or "Kurdistan," but there was no doubt about to whom or what they were referring. The Kurdish regions did continue to suffer from comparative neglect and what development that did take place often only worsened conditions for the great number of Kurds, as noted above.

Throughout this period the Turkish state continued its policy of strictly denying the existence of a distinct Kurdish minority. As the president of the republic, Cemal Gürsel, put in plainly in 1960 ın Diyarbakir while visiting the southeast, "There are no Kurds in this country. Whoever says he is a Kurd, I will spit in his face."[23] In 1961, the Ministry of Education published a second edition of the late Mehmed Şerif Fırat's *Doğu İlleri ve Varto Tarihi* (The Eastern Provinces and the History of Varto) with a foreword written by Gürsel. The book's thesis was simple: there is no Kurdish nation and the Kurds are in fact Turks.[24] Within days of the book's publication protests and demonsrtations erupted in Mardin, Diyarbakir, Van, Bitlis, and Siverek. The Turkish authorities suppressed the demonstrators, and allegedly killed over three hundred doing so.

The adoption just a few short weeks later of the most liberal constitution in Turkey's history made things better for Kurdish intellectuals, but only marginally. Taking advantage of the constitution's provisions for greater freedoms, they managed initially to establish journals and publications that, again, advocated that greater resourcesd and attention be devoted to the east

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[22] Bozarslan, 64.

[23] M. Muller, "Nationalism and the Rule of Law in Turkey," in Robert Olson, ed. *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in 1990s*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 177.

[24] Mehmed Şerif Fırat, *Doğu İlleri ve Varto Tarihi* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, [1948] 1961).

and criticized the lack of freedom of expression. Invariably, however, the authorities shut down these organizations and put the offending authors in prison. Nonetheless, these Kurdish activists did succeed in bringing attention to the Kurdish Question and facilitating the formation a class of nationally conscious intellectuals. The influx of vastly greater numbers of Kurds into universities in the 1970s created a new and sympathetic audience for these debates and ideas.

ABDULLAH ÖCALAN AND THE RISE OF THE PKK

The Turkish state's continued repression of Kurdish identity, the changing socio-economic situation in the Kurdish regions, and the influx of ethnic Kurds into universities combined to lay the groundwork for the most significant development in Turkey's Kurdish Question, the rise of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*) or PKK. From 1984 until the capture of its founder and leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the PKK waged a full-fledged campaign of insurgency and terror against the Turkish Republic and posed the most serious challenge to the republic in its history. It embroiled Turkey in a draining and destructive war that has not yet been concluded.

Abdullah Öcalan, or "Apo" as he is commonly called for short, was born in the province of Şanlıurfa, in the heavily Kurdish southeast. Like many urban Kurds, however, Öcalan spoke Turkish, not Kurdish. While a university student in Ankara at the time of the 1970 military coup, Öcalan became active in Turkish left-wing politics. The Turkish left's subordination of Kurdish issues to the bigger question of revolution, however, alienated him. In 1974 he and six associates resolved to found a movement that would blend Marxist-Leninism with Kurdish nationalism. They withdrew to the southeast and went underground to lay the base for their armed struggle.[25]

Known originally simply as the "Apocular," Turkish for "the followers of Apo," they recruited heavily among the new working class, those Kurds who had left or been driven off their land and migrated to the cities. They felt intense resentment not only toward the Turkish Republic and its nationalist supporters but also toward the exploitative agha class that kept so many Kurds indigent. Öcalan's movement from the beginning thus was directed as much at transforming Kurdish society as at winning independence from the Turkish state.

It is worth noting the irony that although Öcalan and his followers placed themselves in radical opposition to Turkish nationalism, they created a mirror image of Turkish nationalism in their construction of Kurdish nationalism. Where Turkish nationalists created the fantasy of a golden age in a mythical Central Asia, Öcalan and his followers imagined a lost era in Mesopotamia, the home of heroic figures like Kawa the Blacksmith. Öcalan himself took Mustafa Kemal's place as the embodiment of the nation, and created an intense cult of personality that only grew throughout the 1980s. The one-time university student transmuted into a font of timeless love and wisdom for the entire Kurdish nation. His followers hailed him as the vehicle through which a whole new type of Kurd would be born to restore the golden age lost in the past. Öcalan was above his time, responsible to no one and to nothing but the Kurdish future. Those PKK members closest to him acquired a special status and reverence. The cult of Öcalan was manipulated to increase the fighting effectiveness of the PKK. In a carefully choreographed exercise for boosting morale, whenever a PKK fighter was slain, a picture taken earlier of him

[25] McDowall, 420.

next to Öcalan would be released. This served as a signal to those living that the fallen had become immortalized and were martyrs whose death was cause for celebration, not mourning.[26]

In 1978 Öcalan's organization adopted the "Kurdistan Workers' Party" as their name. As the name might suggest, the PKK drew heavily upon Marxist phraseology and concepts for its ideology. Its quasi-Marxist orientation suited its determination to destroy the traditional institutions of Kurdish society and transform that society wholesale.

In its early years the PKK carried out a number of assassination and attacks, but then opted to lay low during the period of military rule from 1980 to 1983. In 1984, however, the movement decided to embark on a new offensive campaign. This was a propitious time to go on the attack. Cooperation between Ankara and Baghdad against the organization of the Iraqi Kurd Masud Barzani had led the latter to decide to cooperate with the PKK and permit it to operate from northern Iraq.

Applying a strategy it had adopted at its 1982 convention, the PKK sought first to demonstrate the vulnerability of Turkish control in the southeast and the inability of the Turkish state to defend its supporters. Having shown the Kurdish masses they had nothing to fear, the reasoning went, the PKK would expand its ranks and, eventually, train and field units that would take on the Turkish army and drive it out of the southeast. The idea that a guerrilla army operating out of northern Iraq and Syria could build itself up sufficiently to defeat the second largest army in NATO bordered on the delusional, but the PKK executed the initial stage of its plan most effectively. It carried out daring ambushes and attacks on Turkish security forces, including even the defense detail of the president. As the PKK had gauged correctly, the Turkish army, although large, was poorly prepared to fight a guerrilla enemy. Despite periodic boasts that it had the situation in hand, the Turkish army early on enjoyed little success countering the PKK.

Alongside attacking Turkish targets, the PKK targeted Kurdish landlords, the aghas. This was calculated to be both a popular move as well as a demonstration of power. For Kurdish society, the striking down of aghas was a radical challenge to the Kurdish cultural status quo, not just the political status quo of the Turkish Republic. Feeding the radicalism was the PKK's socialist ideology and anti-religious orientation, a worldview that was alien to most Kurds. Thus, although the PKK's opposition to Turkish domination and its celebration of Kurdishness inspired many Kurds, its deeds and political message also frightened and unsettled many of them.

As its Ottoman predecessor had done, the Turkish Republic sought to exploit the fissures among the Kurds to isolate, undermine, and defeat the challenge to its rule. Faced with its own inability either to wage an effective counter-insurgency campaign against the PKK or to protect its local supporters, the Turkish state decided to form local militias, called "Village Guards," (*Köy Koruculari*). The Village Guards resembled the old Hamidiye regiments of the turn of the century. In exchange for pledges of loyalty from Kurdish notables, Turkish authorities supplied them with weapons and money. The salaries paid to Village Guards were relatively high, and in

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[26] Bozarslan, 49-51.

the economically depressed southeast they were sought after. The government, however, paid Guard leaders lump sums, providing ample opportunities for padding the rolls with ghost names or skimming salaries. In addition to getting a state-subsidized private army, Kurdish chiefs also acquired a convenient source of income.

As in the time of the Hamidiye, tribal and clan affiliations came into play. Those whose rivals were supporting the PKK responded by joining the Village Guards, and vice-versa. By 1997, the number of Village Guards reached 110,000.[27] The PKK responded by escalating its violence and seeking to sow widespread fear. In 1987 it declared the Village Guards a primary target and began to strike hard at them, willfully murdering whole families of Guard members. It also made a special point of killing teachers of Turkish, seeing them not as agents of socio-economic development but as agents of cultural imperialism.

The Turkish security services undertook their own tactical adaptations. One was that the Turkish army and the "Jandarma" (the "Gendarmerie," a branch of the Turkish armed forces responsible for rural security and policing) established and expanded special operations units to take the war to the PKK in the mountains.[28] Another, more unorthodox response was adopted in the 1990s when after several years of conventional warfare the Turkish armed forces had failed to make much progress fighting the PKK. If anything, the PKK had been only growing stronger and more effective. At this point, the Directorate of Security established new special warfare units for counterinsurgency and authorized cooperation with criminal gangs. Working in tandem, security officials and criminal gangs began employing tactics of assassination and intimidation against the PKK and its supporters both inside Turkey and outside. PKK fundraising was a primary target, and so Turkish criminals were permitted to interdict the PKK's extortion of Kurdish businessmen by extorting the businessmen themselves.

Although the formation of the Village Guards did shore up support for the state in short order, Ankara nevertheless paid a price. By effectively introducing indirect rule and empowering loyal Kurds against the PPK, Ankara necessarily surrendered some of its own control and ceded authority to local actors. Village Guard chiefs had no compunctions against squeezing more money from Ankara by threatening to go over to the PPK. Village Guard chiefs similarly abused their power and location on the borders to engage in smuggling, including narcotics trafficking. Gangs working with the Security Directorate similarly took advantage of their official ties to flout laws. They muscled out the PKK in the extortion of Kurdish businessmen and in the drug trade.

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[27] Kristiina Koivunen, "The Invisible War in Northern Kurdistan," 158. Of course, these numbers are almost certainly inflated and include "ghosts" on the payroll.

[28] A commando officer's account of the war can be found in Alettin Parmaksız, *Burası Hakkari: Ankara'dan Göründüğü Gibi Değil* (Istanbul: Bir Harf, 2004). See also Abdullah Ağar, *5. Tim: Güneş Doğsun İsteriz* (Istanbul: Otopsi Yayınları, 2004).

In addition to the above innovations, Ankara fell back on its more traditional heavy-handed tactics. It continued to suppress any expressions of Kurdish identity, banning the use of Kurdish in 1983. Sweeps of villages, mass detentions, destruction of property, and torture were all employed. Seeking to deny the PKK a rural base, the Turkish security forces razed the countryside and forced the evacuations of thousands of villages. Official figures concede that 380,000 lost their homes, and there is no doubt that this figure falls far short of the real figure.[29] These hundreds of thousands of Kurds were driven form the countryside into the cities. Although no official has conceded as much, it is more than possible that the depopulation was deliberate. Depopulating of the countryside would not only deny support to the PKK but, driving the Kurds into the cities, could also accelerate the process of assimilation of the Kurds. In any event, contrary to predictions of a wave of urban terrorism, it has proven easier to control the Kurds in the cities. The physical effects on the countryside are still visible. While driving from Mardin to Diyarbakir in July 2006, this author witnessed vast tracts of hillsides that the Turkish military had deliberately denuded of vegetation to deny sanctuary to the PKK.

The PKK, too, adapted and evolved during the years of struggle in the 1980s and 1990s. Its initial successes enabled it to emerge as the premier Kurdish organization, and this won over Kurdish intellectuals who had earlier regarded the organization as reckless. These proved critical in building up and staffing the PKK's bureaucratic apparatus. Understanding the need to present a more "rational" program to the outside world, Öcalan began to appoint these "civilian" leaders to important posts in Turkish civil society organizations and in Europe where their ability to articulate the Kurdish cause and project a liberal image by proposing compromises could win public sympathy. The military commanders, however, jealously guarded their autonomy and rejected any notion of compromise. Some did so out of an ideological commitment to the struggle while others, who had exploited their autonomy to "privatize" violence, were interested primarily in perpetuating their control of men and territory.[30]

The PKK's Marxist-Leninism was an affront to many culturally conservative Kurds and inevitably provoked a reaction. In the summer of 1991, an official of the leftist and pro-Kurdish People's Labor Party was murdered in Diyarbakir. Assassinations of other Kurdish politicians, journalists, and intellectuals followed in what became a clear pattern of targeting secularist Kurds.[31] Although it is possible that members of the Turkish "Special Teams" (Özel Timler) operating undercover in the Southeast and elsewhere may have accounted for some of these deaths, it was revealed that Kurdish Islamists were responsible for the majority of them. One such Islamist in an interview with the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* explained that he was fighting for the establishment of an Islamic state and that he opposed the PKK because they "denied the

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[29] Human Rights Watch, "Turkey and War in Iraq: Avoiding Past Patterns of Violation," (March 2003).

[30] Bozarslan, 52-53.

[31] Michael Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 69.

Quran" and sent women to fight alongside men. He said his organization had been founded in Batman in 1987.[32]

Although it possible that there were several organizations of Kurdish Islamists operating against the PKK, observers identified a shadowy organization called *Hizbullah* as the primary one. Relatively little is known about Hizbullah apart from the fact that it was a primarily Kurdish organization that carried out a wave of assassinations of PKK sympathizers and left-wing Kurdish intellectuals.[33] Some allege that the Turkish state actively abetted Hizbullah, seeing it as a useful tool to divide the Kurds and fight the PKK. What does seem clear is that Turkish authorities at least turned a blind eye to it. Police killed the leader of Hizbullah in January 2000 in Istanbul, i.e. only after the capture of Öcalan in 1999. It is fair to say that the emergence of Hizbullah testifies to the inability of the Turkish state to defeat the PKK on its own and its need to mobilize sectors of Kurdish society that were not under its control. It is also illustrates the will to win and resourcefulness of the Turkish state in its struggle against Kurdish separatism.

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[32] Gunter, 71. The PKK has showcased its inclusion of young women in its fighting ranks, making a positive impression on western journalists and human rights officials.

[33] Hürriyet, "Hizbul-Vahşet," (2000), located at http://arsiv.hurriyetim.com.tr/ hizbullah.htm; Human Rights Watch, "What is Turkey's Hizbullah?," 16 February 2000; Bulent Aras and Gokhan Bacik, "The Mystery of Turkish Hizballah," *Middle East Policy* vol. 9 no. 2 (2002); Emre Soncan, "JİTEM'ci Cem Ersever, Hizbullah lideri Velioğlu'ndan istihbarat almış," *Zaman*, 5 September 2005.

THE EVOLUTION OF TURKISH THINKING: FROM TOTAL DENIAL TO TACIT ADMISSION

Even as the Turkish security forces were ratcheting up their efforts to destroy the PKK in the early 1990s, a real breakthrough of sorts occurred in the political realm. Turkish politicians and journalists for the first time began to speak about the existence of Kurds inside Turkey. The Turkish President (and former Prime Minister) Turgut Ozal was particularly bold in breaking the old taboos. Ozal was a native of the city of Malatya in the southeast and partly Kurdish. Among other things, he openly acknowledged his Kurdish ancestry, made public that Turkey was engaged in discussions with the Kurdish groups of northern Iraq, and obtained the repeal of the law banning Kurdish. Turkish politics had evolved greatly since the time of President Gürel.

Ozal had also shown himself eager to participate actively in the 1991 Gulf War alongside the US and the UN Coalition. Declaring that this time Turkey had a chance to sit at the banquet table rather than be served as main course, he had his eyes on the Iraqi province of Mosul, which of course the Turkish Nationalists in 1920 had claimed. Although details were never made public, Ozal is alleged to have harbored the vision of a Turkish-Kurdish federation that would have encompassed northern Iraq. He was also rumored to have been on the verge of making a radical proposal to address Turkey's Kurdish question before his death in 1993. Ozal was an unconventional, even visionary statesman for Turkey, on issues ranging from the Kurds through the liberalization of the Turkish economy to expanding ties with Israel. But even if these rumors are unfounded the mere fact that they were later publicized illustrates the sea change in Turkish politics.

For its part, the PKK by the mid-1990s was achieving mixed results. Despite the PKK's radical nature and its divisive tactics, its war was raising the national consciousness of all Kurds. The war touched the majority of Kurds, and every Kurd, including those outside the southeast, now understood that his or her Kurdishness was politically salient. Yet at the same time, the PKK was no longer making any real headway on the battlefield. Its attempts to operate at the battalion level had resulted in huge losses as the larger and better-equipped Turkish forces engaged them in pitched combat. Small-scale guerrilla attacks and terror were all that remained viable. Öcalan began dismissing the feasibility and desirability of full independence for Turkey's Kurds and indicated that he was willing to negotiate autonomy with Ankara.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

The taboo breaking of Ozal and others and Öcalan's concessions notwithstanding, Ankara throughout the 1990s maintained a hard line toward not just the PKK but also the Kurdish Question in general. It continued to regard the Kurdish Question as primarily one of external subversion and secondarily as one of underdevelopment of the east, and refused to acknowledge Kurdish identity. From the perspective of Turkey's security and political institutions, the Kurdish Question had always been fundamentally about outside exploitation of Turkey's internal fissures. It was something that other states used to sap Turkey's strength and project their influence. The Kurdish Question was only the latest in a series of related such minority questions that began in the Balkans with the Greeks, Bulgarians, Montenegrins etc. Turkey had only narrowly averted the Great Powers' attempt to use the Armenian Question to partition Anatolia. And as the Treaty of Sevres, with its provision for an autonomous Kurdistan alongside an expanded Greece and an independent Armenia, had illustrated, the Kurdish Question, too, was a product of the Great Powers' agenda.

The very structure of the new Turkish Republic, with its insistence on the internal homogeneity of Turkish society, was designed precisely to thwart and deny any attempts at separatism. This mindset and the determination never to permit the reoccurrence of any separatism was burned into the republic's collective psyches of the security institutions from the very beginning.

The saying, "Even paranoids have enemies," certainly has relevance to the Turkish case. Earlier we discussed the interest in the Kurds of the Great Powers, including Russia. Russian interest in the Kurds, however, did not disappear with the Russian Empire. In 1946 the Soviets backed the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iran, the so-called Mahabad Republic, before pulling back in the face of American threats.[34] As mentioned above, Soviet Armenia beamed subversive radio broadcasts in Kurdish from Yerevan into Turkey. During the 1960s, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union supplied arms to Turkish Kurds.[35] The PKK espoused a Marxist-Leninist ideology and enjoyed rhetorical, material, and logistical support from the Soviet Union, its Middle Eastern allies, and other left-leaning terrorist organizations. The PKK made use of training camps in Lebanon and enjoyed backing from Syria.[36]

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[34] Louise Fawcett, "Down but not out? The Kurds in international politics," *Review of International Studies* (2001) 27: 109-118.

[35] Ümit Özdağ, *Türkiye, Küzey Irak, ve PKK: Bir Gayri Nizami Savaşın Anatomisi* (Ankara: Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 1999), 23.

[36] For a brief overview of Syria's dealings with the PKK, see James Brandon, "The PKK and Syria's Kurds," *The Intelligence Summit* (19 February 2007).

Support for the PKK did not, however, come only from Turkey's Cold War rivals. Even its ostensible security partners were backing the PKK. The capture of Öcalan made this painfully clear. Credible threats of invasion made by Turkey in 1998 convinced Damascus to expel Öcalan, who had long enjoyed sanctuary inside Syria and Syrian-controlled Lebanon. From Syria, Öcalan moved to Russia, and then to Turkey's fellow NATO allies Greece and Italy. In all of these countries he enjoyed the open support of prominent politicians and state officials. Human rights advocates and high profile layers from other European countries stepped forward to defend him. Turkish demands for extradition were ignored or rejected outright. For the Turkish public, taught to regard Öcalan as a "baby killing" monster, the efforts of its formal allies to defend and support Öcalan were galling. Only a deep Turcophobia could possibly explain such despicable behavior.

Öcalan was finally caught in Kenya. He had been holed up in the Greece embassy and was traveling with a Greek passport. The US almost certainly played the key role in the capture of Öcalan. It is therefore worth noting that the Turks interpreted this to mean not that the US is a close ally but instead that Turkey remains vulnerable to manipulation by outside powers exploiting the Kurdish Question. If the US indeed is responsible for handing over Öcalan in 1999, the question arises as to why did the US not hand over Öcalan earlier?

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS

Yet Turkish officials have conceded that the Kurdish Question is not solely the product of outside conspirators. It has an internal dimension. Whereas they could not admit to the existence of a distinctly "ethnic" aspect of the Kurdish Question, as that would open the justice of the republic's official nationalist ideology to question, Turkish officials have willingly acknowledged that the east's poverty and underdevelopment has contributed to separatism. This acknowledgement, of course, was not really new. When at the end of the nineteenth century a Kurdish Question was just beginning to emerge, Ottoman observers remarked on the impoverishment of the east and linked that in, in part, to the social structure of the Kurds and in particular the importance played by tribes. The nomadic culture of the Kurds was not conducive to such things as education and rule of law that would facilitate economic development.

Thus early on there was a belief that the solution to the Kurdish Question would require the transformation of Kurdish culture and the elevation of standards of living, and that these two things were interlinked. For most of the republic's history, however, Ankara paid little attention to development issues in the east. As discussed above, its preferred policy of dealing with the Kurdish Question was to deny Kurdish identity and to repress expressions thereof, with force if necessary.

Some statistics effectively convey the economic and social disparities. In the mid-1990s, the per capita gross national product in Turkey's east was just $700, compared to over $2,000 in the west. The east had an illiteracy rate of 26%, more than double that of the west, 12%. The infant mortality rate for the east was sixty, compared to forty-three for the west. Fertility rates for the east were exactly double those in the west.[37]

In the 1980s Ankara began significantly to diversify its approach to the Kurdish Question. Recognizing the need to address the already large and deepening difference in economic development, the Turkish state prepared to undertake a massive investment project in the Kurdish region. Called the Southeast Anatolia Project or GAP, the acronym for *Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*, the project centered on the creation of a series of dams along the Tigris and Euphrates. These dams would generate electricity and supply water for irrigation for the expansion of agriculture. The building of dams and other infrastructure projects such as roads and airports would lift employment numbers itself and create a more attractive climate for further investment and growth.[38]

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[37] A. İçduygu, D. Romano, and İ. Sirkeci, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* vol. 18 no. 1, (1998), 102. The precise meanings of these measurements are not clear, but the important thing is their relative relationship, and this reveals the tremendous gap between the two regions.

[38] The project has its own impressive website, www.gap.gov.tr. The project's description emphasizes that it represents a comprehensive development effort much broader than building dams for hydroelectricity and irrigation.

Although diminishing separatist violence was an unspoken but primary objective of GAP, it served in the short run only to intensify it. Fresh water is a scarce and coveted resource in the Middle East. Turkey is not only blessed with an abundance of native sources of water, but its geography gives it the potential to control the water resources of its neighbors Syria and Iraq. Both countries regarded the construction of dams on the Euphrates with great alarm. Located down river from Turkey and lacking significant water resources of their own, the two countries understood that water supply could be used to put it at Turkey's mercy. Indeed, the threat was severe enough to compel the bitter Baathist rivals, Iraq and Syria, to cooperate. Backing Öcalan and the PKK became one way to pressure Turkey to come to an understanding about water supply.

The war against the PKK put GAP on hold for several years.[39] More significant, however, was the reality that GAP's potential to transform the region positively is limited. For example, GAP promises to be a boon to agriculture. Yet because almost eighty percent of the population owned less than fifty dunums,[40] GAP promises to benefit the small number of large landholders disproportionately. By the 1980s agriculture in the Kurdish region had long ago already become an industrial business dominated by an elite; middle class or "family" farms were numerically insignificant.[41] It is still too early to declare GAP a failure or success. It has brought jobs to the region and improved the investment climate, but whether it will effect enough change to make a qualitative difference in socio-economic conditions remains to be seen.

Whereas Syrian and Iraqi support for the PKK could be understood, the enthusiasm of many western Europeans for the PKK was a source of consternation for many Turks. Organizations openly supportive of the PKK as well as other violently anti-Turkish causes operated freely in Europe, conducting propaganda and raising money, in legal and illegal fashions alike. Human rights groups routinely subjected Turkey to scathing criticism while often ignoring or soft-pedaling the terror of the PKK. High profile figures such as Danielle Mitterand, the wife of the French President, made the plight of the Kurds a pet cause.[42] Their high profiles lent their support for the Kurdish cause an air of *de facto* official legitimacy.

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[39] Christopher Panico, "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (1 April 1995).

[40] In Turkey one dunum is equivalent to 1,000 square meters.

[41] McDowall, 447.

[42] For a sample of Mitterand's views see Danielle Mitterand, "Europe and the Kurds," *The International Spectator* vol. 34 no. 1 (January-March 1999). Her role as a backer of the Kurds does not go unnoticed in Turkey. For examples see Aleks Demirci, "Aydar ve Madam Atina'da," [Aydar and the Madamme are in Athena] *Zaman*, 29.1.1998; "Çırkın Madam yine sahnede" [The Ugly Madamme is on front stage again]*Sabah* (11.10.1998); Saadet Oruç, "Fransız Meclisi Kürt toplantısına ev sahipliği yapıyor," [French Parliament Hosts a Conference of Kurds] *Hürriyet*, 29.11.2005.

The Turks, who have had very limited experience with the idea of civil society, regarded such manifestations for support for the PKK with, at best, bewilderment and resentment. They decided that such sympathy could not be coincidental and must stem from more deep-seated intensions of subverting Turkey and coveting its resources. European behavior fit the template of the imperial Great Powers all too readily.

In reality, the dynamic of European sympathy for the PKK lay in the more prosaic causes of the general popularity of human rights ideology mixed with traditional European prejudices against the Turks. Turkey's relatively close relationship with the United States during the Cold War also fueled the ire of many left-wing organizations in Europe and elsewhere. The presence of significant Kurdish émigré populations in Europe is an additional, and important, factor. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s a great many Kurds sought and received asylum in western Europe. Their motives were a mix of desires to escape the political aspects and economic consequences of the war between the Turkish Republic and the PKK.

These expatriates proved to be an important constituency for the PKK. As a relatively prosperous community, the businessmen among them were ripe targets for extortion. Possession of European travel documents facilitated narcotics trafficking and other forms of transnational crime, and this too became a source of significant funds. By the time of Öcalan's capture, the Kurdish population in Germany was sufficiently influential to deter Germany from participating in the extradition of Öcalan.

In order to better its chances of entering the EU, Turkey refrained from giving Öcalan the death penalty and chose instead to sentence him to life imprisonment. Among many Turks this was a highly unpopular move; Öcalan is perhaps the most despised human in Turkey. European pressure in defense of Öcalan again served to reinforce the xenophobic leanings of nationalist Turks who interpreted European warnings not to execute Öcalan as part of a calculated campaign to keep the PKK alive and weaken Turkey by way of the Kurdish Question.

The capture of Öcalan was a severe blow to the PKK. Although formally the PKK's ideology was a blend of Marxist-Leninism and Kurdish nationalism, in fact it consisted mainly of a cult of Öcalan's personality.[43] The removal of their leader left a great many PKK disoriented and dispirited. The years of struggle had been long and difficult, and there was little to show for them. For some PKK fundraisers, "privatizing" their drug smuggling networks and other sources of revenue was more attractive. Öcalan's brother Osman took over as head, but overall the organization went into a slumber of confusion.

By 1999, the Kurdish taboo had been broken in civil discourse. Newspapers and other media outlets openly used the word Kurd and acknowledged the existence of a "Kurdish Question," even if mainly to criticize the PKK and its foreign backers. Some observers concerned about the long-term argued that the capture of Öcalan provided a unique opportunity for Turkey to

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[43] Bozarslan. The PKK's website (www.pkk.org) even today devotes lavish attention to Öcalan, and flags with Öcalan's visage decorate PKK camps in Iraq.

undertake long-needed reforms that would recognize Kurdish cultural identity and to accelerate investment in the region.

Even from among the security elite there came hints of recognition that the Kurdish Question could not be solved solely through the use of arms and accelerated assimilation. The chief of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*) and his deputy openly suggested in November 2000 that radio and television broadcasts in Kurdish be made. These broadcasts were to be made by state authorities, not private organizations, and their purpose would simply be to deliver official information and propaganda to the Kurds. But the public acknowledgement of the existence of a Kurdish language by senior security officials was itself a remarkable development.[44]

It was also a recognition that Turkey was falling behind in the communications revolution. In 1995, a Kurdish-language satellite television state called "Med-TV" began broadcasting from the UK and Denmark.[45] Turkish pressure forced the closure of Med-TV in 1999 and of its short-lived successor Medya-TV in France. Shortly thereafter, however, Roj-TV began operating from Denmark. Despite Turkish protests, it is still operating and broadcasts in all dialects of Kurdish as well as Turkish, Persian, Assyrian, and Arabic.[46]

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[44] Özgür Doğan, "Kürtçe Yayın Konusunda Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye Tartışmaları," http://ilef.ankara.edu.tr/id/yazi.php?yad=793.

[45] BBC, "Med-TV: Kurdistan in the Sky," 23.03.199

[46] "Roj" is Kurdish for "day" or "sun." Its website can be found at www.roj.tv .

IRAQ AND THE FUTURE OF THE KURDISH QUESTION

It can be said that Turkey emerged the victor out of the fifteen-year war it waged with the PKK from 1984 to 1999. The PKK managed to pose the most sustained and serious challenge to the Turkish Republic in its existence. It mobilized not only significant numbers of Kurds inside of Turkey, but succeeded also in building an effective support network among the Kurdish diaspora, particularly those in western Europe.[47] It achieved backing and endorsement at the high level from states such as Syria, Greece, and Russia, and won sufficient world sympathy such that politicians and officials in other countries were willing to help it.

Yet ultimately the Turkish state demonstrated a will to win as unyielding as that of the PKK's. Ankara was willing to do whatever was necessary to defeat the PKK, ranging from restructuring its armed forces to develop COIN units through the employment of scorched earth tactics and the arming of local militias to the employment of mafia networks. The republic's institutions had successfully instilled the commandment to preserve the territorial integrity of the republic at all costs.

The defeat of the PKK has not, however, meant the end of the Kurdish Question. Despite its military defeat, the PKK succeeded in politicizing the vast majority of Kurds and in raising the profile of the Kurdish Question so high that it can no longer be ignored either in Turkey or abroad. If the Turkish state proved itself to be an irresistible force, the PKK revealed that the Kurdish Question is an immoveable object. The PKK itself is still functioning and in 2006 began mounting attacks on Turkish military targets inside of Turkey.

The strength of Kurdish nationalist, although not necessarily separatist, sentiment can be seen in Turkish election results. Although Turkish law strictly forbids the formation of non-Turkish ethnic political parties, that certain parties are "Kurdish" is an open secret. In the 1990s the leading Kurdish party was HADEP ("Halkın Demokrasi Partisi" or People's Democracy Party). Accused of being tied to the PKK, HADEP was banned in 1997 and reemerged as DEHAP ("Demokratik Halk Partisi" or Democratic People's Party). In 2005 it merged with another party to form the DTP ("Demokratik Toplum Partisi" or Democratic Society Party). Because Turkish election law requires that parties receive at least ten percent of the general vote in order to enter parliament, the Kurdish party has never been able to make it into parliament. But maps for the 1999 and 2002 elections reveal its extraordinary popularity in the Kurdish regions. Currently it controls nearly one quarter of all municipalities in the southeast, including Diyarbakir, the unofficial "capital" of Kurdistan.

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[47] Martin Van Bruinessen, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* vol. 18 no. 1 (1998): 45.

But if the ethno-political mobilization of Turkey's Kurdish southeast might support a separatist dynamic, another legacy of the war, the accelerated migration of Kurds to the west of Turkey, augurs against separation. Diyarbakir may be the unofficial capital of Kurdistan but Istanbul is perhaps the capital of the Kurds. Whereas in 1956 less than 1% of greater Istanbul's population was Kurdish today it may be as high as 10%.[48] Intentional or not, this migration has further strengthened the interdependence of Turks and Kurds. With family and economic ties alike so bound to the west of the country the separation of the southeast would now hurt Kurds in the first order. Although according to some researchers intermarriage between Turks and Kurds remains quite low,[49] migration patterns of the recent past have entwined the two ethnicities more then ever before. This will necessarily put a brake on a renewed separatist campaign and from the standpoint of the Turkish state it may be the most positive development of the past three decades.

After 1999, the Kurdish Question in Turkey receded. The capture of Öcalan demoralized and disoriented the PKK. The Turkish state had, it seemed, revealed its vastly greater strength and demonstrated its will to win. In their celebration of their defeat of the PKK, Turkish officials took their own propaganda of the PKK being primarily a tool of outside powers too seriously. Although some Turks argued that the capture of Öcalan provided a golden opportunity to enact various cultural and economic reforms – with Öcalan in prison no one could doubt that Ankara was moving from strength – no significant action was taken. As noted earlier, in November 2000, the director of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization, Şenkal Atasagun, and his deputy, Mıkdat Alpay, publicly came out in favor of the state making official television broadcasts in Kurdish. Warning that the window of opportunity created by the capture of Öcalan would soon shut, they urged the use of Kurdish as a way to counter the broadcasts of Med–TV.[50] Even this modest proposal – the right to use Kurdish would be restricted to the state – went nowhere, being regarded as too radical.

The victory of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) in 2002, Turkey's bid to join the EU, and the US-led invasion of Iraq have put the Kurdish Question back at the top of the agenda. As a party with Islamist roots and a reformist platform, the AKP is the most flexible of the major Turkish political parties on the Kurdish Question. The worldview of the leadership of the AKP emphasizes Islam, not Turkish blood, as the proper bond for Anatolian society, although the official republican emphasis on Turkish nationalism prevents the AKP from openly repudiating Turkishness as the rightful basis of society. The AKP's greater sympathy for the Kurds as fellow Muslims victimized by the same secular nationalist establishment thus has dovetailed with the AKP's reformist agenda. Similarly, the EU's insistence on the recognition of cultural rights for the Kurds has given greater impetus to rethinking in Ankara of the place of the Kurds. More recently, however, persistent difficulties in Turkey's negotiations with the EU and

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[48] Sirkeci, 157.

[49] Sirkeci claims that just 1% of Turkish women marry Kurdish men and 7% of Turkish men marry Kurdish women. Sirkeci, 153. The former figure strikes this author as too low.

[50] Sedat Ergin, "Kürtçe TV'ye Vize," *Hürriyet*, 28.11.2000.

the possibility of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq have helped feed a powerful wave of nationalist resentment and paranoia among Turks.

IRAQ

The US-led invasion of Iraq sparked a surge of anti-American sentiment among Turkish officialdom and the public alike. There are multiple reasons for this. Initially, these ranged from sentimental feelings for Iraqis as underdogs to a desire among intellectuals to identify more closely with Europe. The most acute reason, however, has been the fear that the toppling of Saddam Hussein was merely one step in an ongoing plan to divide and conquer the Middle East as a whole, including Turkey. US-sponsorship of the Kurdish enclave appeared to many Turks to be only the latest attempt of a great power to invoke ethnicity as a principle for partitioning Turkey. A small, weak Kurdish state in northern Iraq would always be dependent upon the US. The US could use it as a base in the region, and thereby simultaneously diminish its own dependence on Turkey and, through sponsorship of the PKK, gain new leverage over Turkey at a minimum.

The notion that the US would seek to subvert and divide Turkey would strike most Americans as bizarre, but that Washington reserves such an option is taken for granted by Turkish commentators on all parts of the political spectrum. The Turkish officer corps is among those sectors that take this possibility most seriously. The publication in *Armed Forces Journal* of an article by a former US Army colonel suggesting that the US should create an independent Kurdish state on Turkish territory was widely reported in the Turkish press.[51] The sight of the article in the possession of American officers at a NATO meeting in Rome in September 2006 was sufficient to cause their Turkish counterparts to storm out of the meeting and to lead the Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt to protest to his American counterpart General Peter Pace.[52]

A recently published Turkish general's account of his experiences fighting the PKK illustrates well the fear Turkish officers have of outside manipulation of the Kurdish Question. In the beginning of the book, the general makes a point of recounting his confusion when as a naïve junior officer deploying to fight the PKK he learned that the US, Turkey's alleged ally, had refused to supply Turkey with helicopters it needed to fight the PKK. The US, after all, was a NATO ally, so how could it not supply such weapons? Later in the book, he insinuates that the Americans were deliberately letting the Turks bleed themselves fighting the PKK. Resenting what he sees as European double standards on the banning of Kurdish political parties and the military's toppling of elected officials, he lambastes the EU for not condemning Spain when it closed political parties or Austria when it removed the popularly elected Jorg Haider. The reforms being pushed on Turkey by the EU, he writes, "demonstrate a demand to destroy many

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[51] "Amerikalı albaydan Türkiye'yi bölen Ortadoğu haritası," *Zaman*, 8.07.2006; "ABD'yı Bağlayamaz," *Milliyet*, 10.08.2006; Coşkun Yaman, "ADD'den Ortadoğu haritasına tepki," *Hürriyet*, 16.10.2006. For the article, See Ralph Peters, "Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look," *Armed Forces Journal* (2006). The article can be accessed at http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/06/1833899.

[52] Süleyman Kurt, "Carved-up Map of Turkey [sic] at NATO Prompts US Apology," *Today's Zaman*, 29.09.2006.

of our national values." He charges that diplomats and spies under academic guise travel in Turkey to study the ethnic makeup of the people and encourage them to demand special minority status. America, according to him, seeks to punish Turkey for its failure to support the invasion of Iraq and so has initiated "an intense psychological operation." He closes his book with following appeal, "If we want to live as a free, independent, and honorable member of the world, if we do not want to be accused by our grandchildren of not defending the indivisibility of the country, come, let us as a state, as a nation, break the chains that are trying to strangle us."[53]

Another retired Major General writes in his book, *Terror: Why Turkey?* that whereas Turkey so successfully transformed itself from a multiethnic imperial state into a nation-state that it is more homogenous than many nation-states in western Europe, the western countries consistently work to portray Turkey as multiethnic. These countries push on Turkey an agenda of minority rights and multilingual education and broadcasting in order to incite and encourage separatism.[54]

The perception that imminent danger threatens Turkey's very existence is not restricted to officers. In a very rare public statement, the Chief of the National Intelligence Organization Emre Taner, speaking at the celebration of the organization's founding anniversary, asserted that the world order is changing and that some states would lose their sovereignty. Explaining that Turkey was at the center of several ongoing wars, he warned that Turkey could not afford a defensive "wait and see" attitude but must act aggressively. MİT is undergoing rapid reform in order to meet the challenges it faces, but needs greater resources.[55]

Many Turks greeted the appointment of a special "coordinator" to facilitate American-Turkish cooperation toward the PKK with skepticism, believing that the very idea suggests that the PKK's existence is negotiable. Prime Minister Erdogan's declaration in January 2007 that the office of coordinator had failed to achieve any positive results was greeted with approval by much of the media.[56]

Most recently, on 16 May 2007 the Chief of the General Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt delivered a speech to graduates of the Turkish War Academy in which he directly described Turkish cooperation with the establishment of a no-fly zone above the 36th parallel after the 1991 Gulf War as a mistake. That is a very thinly veiled statement that Turkey has erred in working with the US in northern Iraq. In the speech he also underscored the importance of Kerkuk and its

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[53] Alaettin Parmaksız, *Burası Hakkari: Ankara'dan Göründüğü Gibi Değil* (Istanbul: Bir Harf Yayınları, 2006), 27, 346, 357, 370, 375.

[54] Suat İlhan, *Terör: Neden Türkiye?* (Ankara: ASAM, 2002), 258-259.

[55] "MİT'ten ilginç çıkış," *Milliyet* 06.01.2007

[56] Fikret Bila, "Edip Paşa istifa etmeli mi?" *Milliyet* 05.01.2007. Bila is a columnist with close ties to the higher ranks of the Turkish Armed Forces.

future status for Turkey.[57] The Turkish media continues to attach vastly inordinate attention to claims that the US is deliberately working against Turkey with the PKK.[58]

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[57] The speech was closed to the press, but the text of the speech was subsequently published. It is a fascinating text not just for what it says about the Turkish military's misgivings about cooperation with the US and NATO in Iraq and Afghanistan but even more for Büyükanıt's references to scientists and philosophers from Aristotle and Galileo to Imre Lakatos and Stephen Hawking, Clausewitz and his critics, and the utility of Chaos Theory for understanding the post-Cold War world. The text can be found at http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/03/30/son/sonsiy04.asp.

[58] The articles of a relatively unknown American columnist named Scott Sullivan alleging American intrigues against Turkey, for example, are receiving widespread attention inside Turkey. See http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/03/31/son/sondun07.asp for coverage of Sullivan's claim that Secretary of Defense Gates and former Ambassador to Turkey Eric Edelman are conspiring against Turkey in favor of Iran. Sullivan's article, "Gates Protects Iran, Attacks Turkey" can be found at http://www.theconservativevoice.com/article/23911.html.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

This author in July 2006 undertook a two-week trip to Istanbul and the Kurdish region. The cities I visited included Mardin, Diyarbakir, and Van. Travel was by automobile or bus. Due to the extremely sensitive nature of the Kurdish Question I decided it would be counter-productive to conduct interviews with either Turkish officials or Kurdish activists. The views of both can be located in printed materials and remain on the whole fairly predictable. Police surveillance of reports and researchers is common, and Turkish officials still sometimes ban foreign researchers from the country who work on minorities and similarly sensitive topics.

I decided therefore that it would be more useful to obtain insights into the situation from people who were not overtly politicized. I therefore contacted members of the Fethullah Gülen movement. As neither agents of the Turkish state nor sympathizers with the PKK or Kurdish nationalism, I knew that either would not influence their views. Moreover, because the movement includes people from a tremendous array of society, I was able to talk to students, educators, local officials, tribal chiefs, religious figures and a wide range of businessmen from small grocers to department store owners. What follows are my general impressions of the current state of the Kurdish southeast.

Most of the same factors that defined the region at the turn of the twentieth century are still operative. Low levels of education and illiteracy continue to mark the region. Indeed, lack of education was cited by virtually everyone I spoke with as the main obstacle to the region's further integration with the rest of Turkey and as the main contributing factor to violence. Low educational levels retard economic development and render individuals more susceptible to the appeals of political radicals. Bookstores were comparatively rare in each city, and newspapers surprisingly difficult to get hold of. This is, no doubt, an indicator of the low levels of literacy.

Although – or perhaps because – many of the people I met were involved in education they were not entirely optimistic about whether the ongoing efforts to improve and expand educational opportunities would be sufficient to meet the tremendous need in Kurdistan. The data indicating a high birth rate and growing population are supported by casual observance. The cities, and Diyarbakir in particular, are filled with children and adolescents. Many respondents informed me that a Kurdish family with eight or ten children is very normal. Although it is impossible to collect demographic data on Kurds directly, available studies support the thesis that the Kurdish population is growing rapidly.[59] Undoubtedly, the process of urbanization will rapidly decelerate

[59] Mehrdad Izady, "The Kurdish Demographic Revolution and Its Socio-Political Implications," in Ole Hoiris and Sefa Martin Yürükel, *Contrasts and Solutions in the Middle East* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997), 473-488. Mehrdad calculates that the Kurdish population is growing annually at 3.65%. Placing the Kurds at 24.4% of Turkey's population in 1990, he predicts that the Kurds will constitute 36.8% and 45.2% of the population in 2020 and 2050 respectively. The estimate of 24.4% strikes this author as inflated, and the predictions extrapolate from assumed current trends and thus are not very reliable in their specifics. But there is no reason to question the overall trend of a Kurdish population growing rapidly both absolutely and relatively.

the population growth but for now there is no doubt that the Kurds are experiencing a demographic boom. That boom may prove too big and overwhelm the expanding education sector and the beginnings of economic growth.

The effective end of the war with the PKK has already paid significant dividends in terms of the economy. Although each of the cities was relatively poor and underdeveloped, there was plenty of activity in all of them. I was told that this economic boom is a recent phenomenon, dating back only to the past few years, but that it is a welcome break with the grinding poverty and hopelessness of the recent past. The economy of the southeast, while growing, is still fragile. The economy at this stage is more dependent on security than it is a potential generator of security.

If the war was the biggest impediment to economic growth, another one is the poor quality of the region's human resources. In addition to being poorly schooled and often illiterate, the Kurds, businessmen told me, were crippled by a mindset of entitlement. Many Kurds hold the government and its policies responsible for the disparity between western and eastern Turkey. They therefore interpret the poor conditions of the east as manifestations of a deliberate policy of depriving Kurds. They are more inclined to threaten and cajole state officials to do something for them than they are to take the initiative. The recent increase in economic opportunities is in some sense paradoxically making things worst. The region's most talented businessmen tend to leave for other parts of Turkey because they can pursue bigger and easier profits elsewhere.

The rapid urbanization of the Kurds might seem to augur well for future stability. Urbanization often correlates with higher levels of education, lower fertility levels, and the atomization of individuals and their integration into state and civil society structures. In short, urbanization is an important step toward modernization. Available figures indicate that the increase in numbers of city-dwelling Kurds has been enormous.

First-hand observation tempers this expectation that the experience of urbanization will change the new Kurdish immigrants. Instead, it is more the case that the immigrants are changing the cities. With the exception of Mardin, the smallest of the cities, none of the cities I saw retained much of an "urban spirit" or provided powerful examples of city life. Diyarbakir and Van, as well as much of Kurdish Istanbul, are better described as large villages. Indeed, inside Diyarbakir many families graze livestock. If economic growth should cease – a very likely possibility should the security situation deteriorate – it is probable that the urban settlements in which most Kurds live will become dead-end slums breeding dissension rather than gateways to future modernity.

The most troublesome districts in Istanbul are the heavily Kurdish districts. Most of these have their origins as so called *gecekondu*s. The word *gecekondu* means literally "put up at night" and is used to refer to the settlements thrown up on the outskirts of Istanbul, Ankara, and other large Turkish cities by incoming waves of rural immigrants. Unable or unwilling to find accommodation in already established municipal districts, these immigrants simply started building ramshackle shelters on the city edges. In some cases authorities tore down the shelters and expelled the immigrants, but often found other immigrants arriving. Eventually, in exchange for votes, many municipalities formally legitimated these districts and incorporated them.

Nonetheless, the level of municipal and state services in these districts remains sub-standard. There poverty, crime, and political activism mix and feed on each other. The fact that many Turkish police officers identify with ultranationalist ideas and take an especially dim view of the Kurdish immigrants only adds fuel to the fire.

Turkish state officials, scholars, and even many Kurdish nationalists have long identified tribalism as the bane of the Kurds. One might expect that as a result of the tremendous changes experienced by Turkey's Kurds in the past century that tribal affiliations would have weakened to the point of insignificance. Yet interviews that I conducted with state officials who work in the rural areas and with tribal chiefs outside of Mardin informed me of the opposite. The tribes and tribal identities remain an important factor. The tradition of blood feuds continues. When I asked one ten year old Kurdish boy who hitched a ride with us whether he liked school, he explained that he could not go to school because his clan was engaged in a blood feud with the teachers at the school. The murder occurred two years earlier, and since that time the boy had not been able to attend school.

Adults confessed to me that tribal rivalries remain strong. Several, including tribal members and a state official responsible for overseeing services in rural areas, explained that only the presence of the state keeps them from each others' throats. To be sure, this could be exaggerated, although I did not have the sense in these conversations that my interlocutors were trying to justify or impress upon me the importance of the presence of the Turkish state in the Kurdish regions. In any event, there is no doubt that the tribal factor remains a real one in Turkey's southeast, and its effects on stability continue to be mixed. While on the one hand it impedes political and economic development, on the other hand it divides and weakens the strength of Kurdish nationalists and thereby helps preserve the status quo.

CONCLUSION

The Kurdish Question will continue to remain the biggest challenge to the future of Turkey. It has constituted a tremendous challenge throughout the republic's history, but its salience has increased due to demographic, development, and international trends. Turkey's Kurds today are more numerous both in absolute and proportionate terms, are better educated, and now possess next door in Iraq an example of a successful autonomous Kurdish political entity.

A fundamental goal of the Turkish Republic from its very beginning has been the homogenization of Anatolia's Muslims and the creation of a uniformly "Turkish" society within its borders. This achievement would prevent the recurrence of the bane of the Ottoman Empire: the incitement of nationalist separatist movements by Great Powers for the purpose of partition. The republic was remarkably successful in socializing almost all of its Muslims as Turks but has largely failed with the Kurds. Whereas significant numbers of Kurds have been assimilated and absorbed into general Turkish society, the majority have not been. Moreover, Kurdish national consciousness has over time only increased due to spread of education, improvement in communications, and the effect of the war with the PKK. That war sharply politicized Kurdish identity, forcing all Kurds to, at some level, acknowledge their Kurdishness, even if they chose to remain loyal to the Turkish Republic.

There is no good reason to expect that the Turkish state will succeed in assimilating its Kurds in the medium or even long-term future. The advances in communications technology, spread of education, and the example of Kurds abroad virtually ensures that Turkey's Kurds will not only maintain but also even further develop a distinct ethnic identity. A compactly settled Kurdish population will continue to predominate in the southeast. This area will for some to come continue to lag behind all other regions of Turkey for the same reason it currently does: relative geographic isolation from markets, low levels of literacy, low levels of capital, and cultural norms including tribalism and a sense of entitlement, not to mention the real possibility of continued violence. The recent return of the PKK will almost certainly deter investment and impede development. Through GAP Ankara is attempting to address many of these development problems. There is reason to believe it will be at least partially successful but this will contribute at most marginally to alleviating Kurdish dissatisfaction.

To be sure, there are factors working against Kurdish separatism. The most important is that Turkey, and especially the Turkish military, still possesses a resolute determination to prevent separatism, and the Turkish state retains an overwhelming superiority in capabilities resources over the PKK specifically or its Kurdish population in general. Contrary to Turkish paranoia, no outside powers that are both capable and desirous of partitioning Turkey exist. Although it is clear that Turkey's Kurds have experienced a significant growth in national consciousness, it is not at all clear to what degree this translates into political unity. Tribal dynamics, for example, continue to operate against unity.

Economic development will probably prove a mixed blessing. Continued economic growth will improve material conditions in the southeast absolutely but not necessarily relative to the west of Turkey. The southeast will, on balance, remain a less attractive for investment than the other

regions of Turkey with which it will have to compete. Its main source of comparative advantage, cheap labor, is probably not enough to compensate for the low levels of literacy and a culture of dependency. Whether or not GAP will succeed in stimulating investment remains to be seen. Long seen by many Turks and others as the key to resolving the Kurdish Question, economic development may paradoxically aggravate the situation by not relieving perceptions of relative deprivation while providing greater resources for separatist movements. A resentful but wealthier and better-educated population is a population more difficult to control.

The shift of the Kurdish population to western Turkey, however, is one of the most important structural factors working against Kurdish separatism. The idea of separatism even in principle makes less and less sense for the growing number of Kurds who live in the west of Turkey and those who have relatives in the west. Similarly, the growth of the economy in the southeast will only increase integration with the west of Turkey as there are no comparable sources of investment or economic opportunity in Iraq, Syria, or Iran. Indeed, economic ties currently give Turkey significant leverage over northern Iraq.

But if the likelihood of a successful Kurdish separatist movement is on balance diminishing, the likelihood of Turkey finding a successful resolution of the Kurdish Question remains small. Turkey's ability to adapt to Kurdish Question is structurally limited. To be sure, over the past eight decades, the attitudes of the Turkish state and society toward the Kurdish Question have evolved significantly. Where before public discourse staunchly denied the existence of a Kurdish reality, it now recognizes one. It has permitted cultural organizations and limited publishing in Kurdish.

This process of liberalization began in the era of Turgut Özal and accelerated in the 1990s as a result of the war with the PKK. The current situation on Iraq is having a mixed effect. On the one hand, the specters of a US-sponsored Kurdish state on Turkey's border has reinvigorated intense paranoia about Kurdish separatism, in particular from the Turkish military. This has resulted in a tremendous upswing in aggressive nationalist sentiment inside Turkey. On the other hand, it has permitted Turkish politicians, journalists, and academics to debate issues of Kurdish identity in public.

Among the more striking developments have been the suggestions by Mehmet Ağar, leader of the center-right True Path Party, that all members of the PKK other than the high leadership should be amnestied. As Interior Minister under Tansu Çiller in the early 1990s, Ağar was known for his ruthless prosecution of the war against the PKK. Many Kurds and some others therefore remain skeptical about the sincerity of his comments. Ultimately, however, it is not their sincerity that is significant but rather the fact that they are being uttered at all.[60]

Continued liberalization leading ultimately to the full and formal recognition of Kurdish ethnicity is the most logical solution to Turkey's Kurdish Question, and many developments

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[60] Tamer Aydın, "Mehmet Ağar Parlatılıyor," *Nasname*, 15.10.2006; Hakan Tahmaz, Ağar'dan AK Parti'ye Kürt Sorunu, *Yeni Şafak*, 20.12.2006.

noted above are pointing in that direction. But a tremendous, perhaps insurmountable obstacle remains: full recognition of the Kurdish reality would require an overhaul of the Turkish state and its legitimacy. Turkish nationalism is too fundamental a part of Kemalism and the Turkish Republic to be abandoned or radically altered without throwing the whole republican project open to question. It would throw everything up for debate, and therefore it is unlikely to take place, even if everyone were to agree in principle.

The Turkish state over the course of the twentieth century demonstrated an impressive resilience and determination to maintain its territorial integrity in Anatolia. The recent war with PKK demonstrated most recently its commitment to go to great lengths to defend Turkey's territorial integrity. To judge by statements and publications, that spirit is still strong in both the ranks of the Turkish military and society at large.

US policymakers must recognize that this spirit, however, is tied up with xenophobia in general and anti-Americanism in particular. The Kurdish Question is not solely a domestic issue for Turkey. Because the Kurds are a transnational group, and status of Kurds in other countries impacts Turkey, Turkey's Kurdish Question possesses several international dimensions. EU calls for recognition of Kurdish rights and improvement in the conditions of Kurds raise Turkish fears of great power malevolence. Disingenuous use of such issues by European politicians to keep Turkey out of the EU further fans those fears and resentment. Similarly, US action in Iraq has incited historically rooted Turkish fears of US designs and the US use of the Kurds.[61] Military and security officials feel this keenly. But there is a realization that Kurdish state in Iraq is a reality and cannot be avoided.[62]

In the final assessment, Turkey's Kurdish Question resembles the clash between an irresistible force and an immovable object. The existence, growth, and strengthening of Kurdish identity can hardly be stopped. At the same time, the Turkish Republic retains both enormous determination and resources to keep its Kurdish population under control. It is precisely this clash of fundamentals that preoccupies Turkish officials. In their minds a false move or hesitance to act could imperil the very existence of the republic. Those dealing with Turkey are therefore strongly advised not to underestimate either the resolve of Turkish officials to contain the Kurdish Question or the desperation that might lead them to undertake aggressive actions against both Kurdish separatists and those who are seen to be backing them.

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[61] Hasan Celal Güzel, "ABD'nın Kürt Oyunu," *Radikal* 11.01.2007.

[62] Can Dündar, "Eski MİT Müsteşarı'ndan tarihi bir yorum: Türkiye Kürt devletiyle yaşamayı öğrenmeli" *Milliyet*, 11.01.2007.